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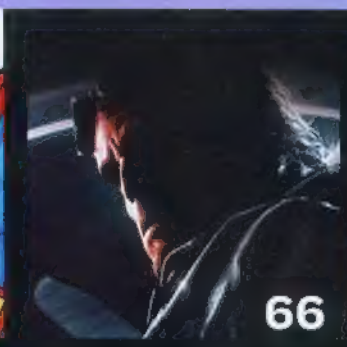

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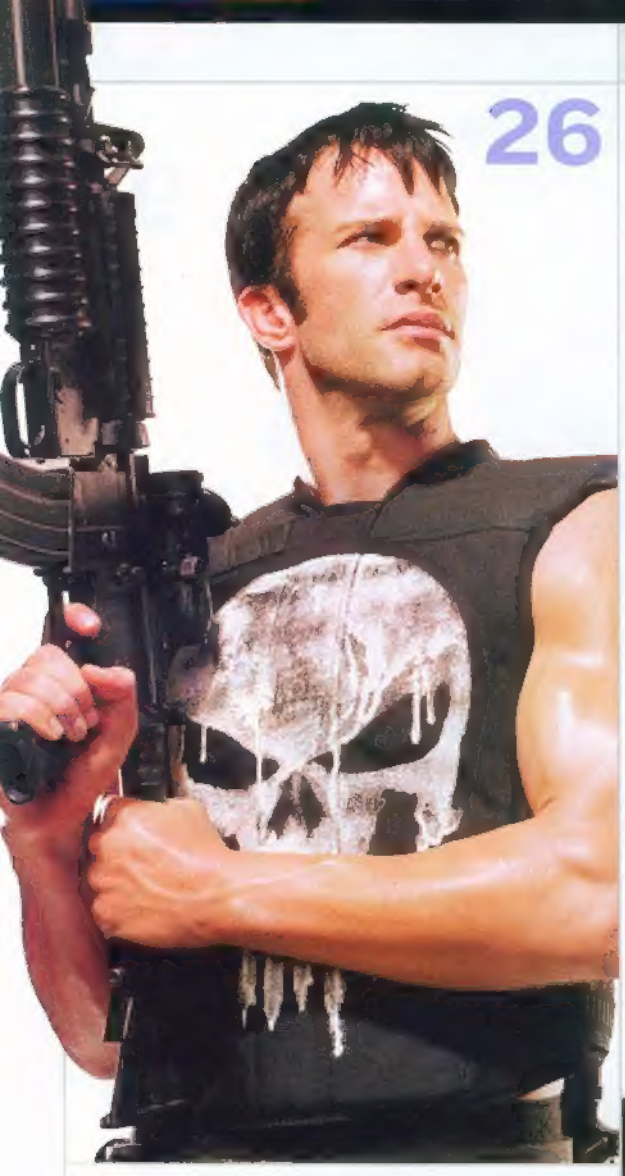
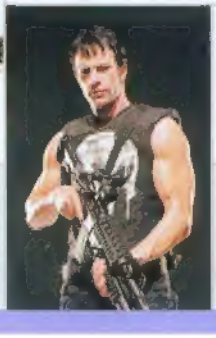


the covers

Punisher (left) leads into our **Punisher Set Visit on p. 26** and the exclusive **Making of the Punisher Cover on p. 34.** Wolverine (center) by Brian Bolland and Secret War (right) by David Finch and Art Thibert kick off our 'Secret War' coverage with our **S.H.I.E.L.D. profiles on p. 84.**



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TEEN TITANS 1/2

THE ORIGIN OF THE ALL-NEW RAVAGER!

SENSATIONAL SNEAK PEEKS!

This ish will surely get the fanboys and girls drooling.

Sure, every month, we put out more comic goodness than any other publication on the stands, but this issue in particular has not one, but two amazing previews!

Come April, Superman gets all-new creative teams on all his books, and leading the way will be Jim Lee and Brian Azzarello on *Superman*, which we preview on page 56. Lee generated major heat in 2003 while penciling the 12-issue blockbuster "Hush" storyline in *Batman* with Jeph Loeb, which culminated in his being named *Wizard*'s Best Penciler of 2003. Azzarello's no slouch in the writing department either; he's a two-time *Wizard* Best Writer winner for his work on *100 Bullets*, *Banner* and *Hellblazer*, just to name a few.

Also get a first look at the new *Spider-Man* book in the Marvel Knights line over on page 74, courtesy of writer Mark Millar (*The Ultimates*) and artist Terry Dodson (*Trouble*). Millar, known for over-the-top action books like *The Ultimates* and *Wanted*, promises that this'll be the grittiest Spider-Man book allowable by law.

Plus, get a peek at how writer Brian Michael Bendis will be handling classic Marvel U. heroes when you read his *Secret War*/S.H.I.E.L.D. Profiles on page 84. And get a load of this—we even asked super-artist David Finch to do a homage of Mike Zeck's original *Secret Wars* #1 cover. Finch, however, illustrated the characters that'll star the new mini-series. Check it out at right.

Face it, fans, this ish will drive you over the edge! Dive in and enjoy!

Sincerely,

Gareb Shamus

BYTHENUMBERS...

24 Cumulative inches of snow that fell in two separate December snowstorms

1 Wizard staffer who had never seen snow before (Associate Editor and Florida native Alex Segura Jr.)

1 Wizard staffer we transformed into a snowman (Research Assistant Kari Cramer, ladies and gents!)

215 Times Editor Brian Cunnighnam had to show the "Spider-Man 2" trailer to various staffers on his mega-awesome computer because others couldn't get it to load

435 BPRD beanies distributed by Dark Horse Comics and *Wizard* staffers at the Wizard World Texas show

35 Beanies *Wizard* staffers kept for themselves

47 Times Associate Editor Jesse Thompson insisted that he needed his own publicist after appearing as a "Punisher" movie extra (p. 26)

12 Times Staff Writer Richard Ho told Ron Perlman to "Give 'em hell!" during his Hellboy Set Visit (p. 66)

12 Times Perlman slapped Ho with the Right Hand of Doom

10 Times Staff Writer Todd Casey was caught snoozing at his desk while "doing research" for his *Deep Sleeper* "Secret Stash" (p. 116)

masthead

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SNOWMAN PICTURED!

ENVELOPE ART

ALLEN BAUS, Mendham, NJ

Boxers or briefs: the debate rages... Creators missing in action... and never fear, queer is here!

Eat your heart out, Bravo!

Beyond all expectations, "Queer Eye for the Super-Guy" was the most talked about topic of *Wizard* #147—and the response has been astoundingly positive! Mountains and mountains of adoring letters flooded our mailbins, call for the return of the Fab Three. Mark it down in the win column! 'Course, it wouldn't be a Magic Words column without some humor of the heterosexual variety. Rest assured, we've got that angle covered, too.

Don't worry; you'll see what we mean.

Wizard,

Thanks for the great "Queer Eye for the Super-Guy" feature! With my two favorite forms of entertainment—superhero comics and pro wrestling—geared almost exclusively towards straight teenage boys and 20-something men, I sometimes feel like the only gay 31-year-old interested in these worlds. Granted, comics have made greater strides reaching out to gay readers (the only reason I've started reading *Uncanny X-Men* again is the inclusion of Northstar on the team). Still, it fuels my own gay pride just to know that there are "out" comic creators like Phil Jimenez, Robert Rodi and José Villarrubia.

Thanks to the *Wizard* staff for jumping on the totally played-out metrosexual/queer-makover bandwagon, and doing it in an original and fun way! Keep up the hilarious work. I'll never look at Galactus the same way again!

GEORGE GOLGA
geol972@earthlink.net

Never let it be said that *Wizard* is an enemy of the well-dressed and obsessively clean!

All joking aside, we're happy to help fight the supervillain known as ignorance and prejudice, in all of its myriad forms.

"An enormous thank you to fans for the response!" says Fab Three member Phil Jimenez. "And we'd love to bring the feature back every few months. The show actually revitalizes apartments too, so we've talked about redoing secret bases—how would we redecorate the Danger Room, or the Bat-cave? [*Laughs*] But anyway, I think it's really awesome that *Wizard* readers dug it and appreciated the well-intended humor. And not only did they respond to the humor, but they also understood that some of them were very serious attempts to invigorate the characters. And we really appreciate *Wizard* letting us do it!"

It was our pleasure! After all, no one loves gay more than us.

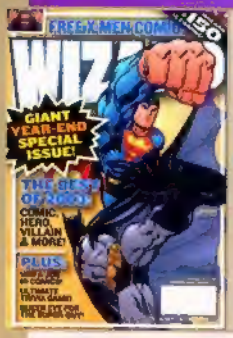
Dear Wizard,

We know that Lady Death went to CrossGen, but what happened to other former Chaos! Comics properties like Purgatori and Chastity? Has anybody bought the rights to them?

CHRISTIAN BANKES
Gomorral3@aol.com

Yessir. The entire stable of Chaos! Characters (minus Lady Death, of course) was up for grabs earlier this year during a public auction, which netted a winning bid of $50,000 by Georgia-based retailer Tales of Wonder. The proud new owners of Purgatori, Chastity and friends plan to resurrect these charac-

QUICKHITS



I just finished reading your "Queer Eye for Super-Guy" article [in *Wizard* #147] and I am just now wiping away the tears from laughing.

BRIAN D. DAVIS
WENTZVILLE, MO

How about giving the Wizard Bunny a makeover too, just to see what would happen?

GTIGERPOWER@AOL.COM

Does anyone else think you missed something from your Alan Moore feature in issue #147? *V for Vendetta* ranks level with *Watchmen* and *From Hell* in my book any day.

ROBIN EDDY
ROBINEDDY@HOTMAIL.COM

I don't drink, but if I were a bartender, I'd never say "last call" to Alan Moore.

ABE E.
ABE0412@HOTMAIL.COM

Issue #500 of *Amazing Spider-Man*, in one issue, completely sums up why Spider-Man is and always will be my favorite character.

BEN PYLE
HARRISBURG, IL

You think *Batgirl: Year One* is the best mini-series of 2003, rather than *Formerly Known as the Justice League*?

DANIEL MCMASTERS
DMCPROP@HOTMAIL.COM

***Teenagers From Mars* is THE best comic of 2003. I am waiting with baited breath for the grand finale.**

FAMOUSDAVE22I@AOL.COM

Without a doubt, *New X-Men* was the best comic book series of 2003.

MARK KILLEEN
LAKE ORION, MI

Best book of 2003? It's *The Losers*, hands down. It's like "The Shield"—I don't want to get up to go to the john.

FARHAT AHMAD
MADISON, WI

If it's not my daddy's secret war, not of cosmic proportion, not a contest of champions and there is no Beyonder, why does Marvel call it *Secret War*?

PATRICK BÉRUBÉ
LITTLEPATRICK@HOTMAIL.COM

What do you think of THIS issue? Let us know. Send an e-mail to: magicwords@wizarduniverse.com and be heard...er, read.

ters by licensing them out to outside publishers. No deals have been struck so far, so Chaos! crazies will just have to wait a bit longer for their favorite properties to rise from the dead.

Magic Words,

I was recently thumbing through my comic collection when I came across two of my favorite artists: Art Adams and J. Scott Campbell. I was wondering if you guys at *Wizard* might be able to tell me if they have any interior penciling projects coming up in the near future. I've heard about a new Art Adams project called *Busty Trio*. (I have been collecting *Tom Strong's Terrific Tales*, which Art has been penciling part of.) And as for J. Scott Campbell, I've seen some sketches of a "super-secret project." Any information you could pass on to me would be greatly appreciated.

BEAU HILLIARD
Beaumountie@aol.com

Always happy to put my thumb to good use, I'll gladly flip through my trusty rolodex to dig up some dirt on these missing fan favorites.

"I'm currently hard at work on that 'top secret' new book for WildStorm," confirms *Danger Girl* creator Campbell. "And I expect to make a big announcement regarding it this summer. The long wait has to do with me drawing most of the issues in advance of any solicitation, so I can avoid any possibility of late shipping. But it's going to be huge!"

As for Adams? "I'll be continuing working on the Jonni Future stories for *Tom Strong's Terrific Tales*," reports the artist. "And besides occasional covers, that's about it for now!" As for the creator-owned *Busty Trio*? "That's still in the planning stages—we're looking for just the right trio of busty girls for models," laughs Adams. "But hopefully I'll have some more stuff in the future that people will be interested in!"

Dear Wizard,

After browsing around for a while on the Wizard World Texas convention floor, I stocked up on some missing issues from my collection and grabbed *Avengers* #183 and #184. I get home to read them, and what do you think I find in the letters page? A letter from Kurt Busiek. Since letters pages have become a thing of the past, I had forgotten how many current writers and artists were frequent letter writers. So my question is this: Can you send out a message to DC, Marvel and the rest that we fans read and enjoy the letters pages? They are a vital part of the comic and the comics community. I hope that they might make a comeback. By the way, the letter from Busiek was also stating the importance of the letters page. Strange how that was a problem in 1979 and still is now.

DIDJA KNOW?

Kurt Busiek also had letters printed in *Fantastic Four*, *Thor* and *Marvel Two-In-One*, among others.

CHRIS TAYLOR
Keller, Texas

I'm somewhat partial to letters pages myself. [Ahem.] They give readers a unique sense of participation in their favorite books—not to mention the thrill of being published. "It was fun to see my name in print, and I met others fans through the lettercols," recalls letter maestro Busiek. "And it was always a treat when I heard back from someone—[writers] Roger Stern and Bill Mantlo would occasionally write notes back."

But the onset of online message boards has driven these columns nearly obsolete. "While people complain that Internet message boards aren't the same thing, the fact is that the more people talk comics online, the less they feel they need to send letters in," explains Busiek.

Still, the good news is that some books have carried on the tradition—titles like *Ultimate X-Men*, *Runaways*, *Mystique* and Busiek's own *Astro City* and *Arrowsmith* still reserve space every month for letters from fans.

"I still love 'em," says Busiek, "and I'd suggest to anyone who wants letter columns that they write letters. Even if the book doesn't have a lettercol at the moment, the creators would like to hear what you think."

Wizard,

As a manager in a comic shop, I've noticed the increased sales in DC comics. And as a long-standing DC fan, I couldn't be happier. However, my question (which I suppose should be directed towards the Man of the Year, Dan DiDio) is this: Why can't we see an Ultimate DC universe?

I understand that DC may be concerned about copying Marvel, but come on! You guys *created* superheroes! These characters are over 60 years old and are in desperate need of reinvention. It's not against the law to recreate these heroes. You did it in the late '50s, and partially in the mid-'80s, so let's see it again! Please!!!

CHRIS JUPP
Burlington, Ontario, Canada

For DC's main man, it's not a matter of not wanting to copy Marvel—he just doesn't see the need to totally reboot the company's characters.

"We're constantly evolving our characters to reflect the attitudes of the time," explains DiDio. "So as far as I'm concerned, all we need is great creators working on great properties—and judging by your reactions to our books, it seems to be working."

Still not convinced? Well, the debate rages on.

Ho bag,

I thought about asking you what your favorite comic book movie of all time was, but that's so played out. Instead, I wanna know your favorite Richard Pryor movie of all time. (I guess you could kill two birds with one stone and say "Superman III," but nobody likes that movie, so you'd be lying.)

JAMES BLAUVELT
Salt Lake City, Utah

First off, thou shalt refer to me as Ho. Ho bag is what I tote my stuff around in.

Second off, my knowledge of Richard Pryor flicks pretty much starts and stops with "Superman III," so I'm calling in reinforcements in the form of *Wizard* Associate Editor (and bad movie mogul) Jesse Thompson.

"My fave Pryor flick has gotta be 'The Toy,'" reveals the bleary-eyed Thompson. "Disturbing racial overtones aside, it features Pryor (pre-cocaine freebasing accident) running around in a Spider-Man costume with a kid who's 'purchased' him to be a playmate. Hey, any movie that throws in Spidey, a piranha and a Wonder Wheel has gotta be a winner, right?"

Right you are, Jesse. Now try and watch a flick made after 1986, ya freak.

Dear Magic Words,

Guys, I love *Wizard*, but the whole "we only hype Marvel or DC talent" thing is getting tired. Look around—there's some great talent out there doing independent books! Don't get me wrong, I realize *Wizard Edge* focuses on that area of comicdom, but

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WEIRDOMAIL

Yo Wiz Guys,

Thanks to *Ultimate Spider-Man*, we now know that Doc Ock wears "tighty-whities." We also know that with how tight that costume is, Spidey isn't wearing boxers. That got me to thinking: With all those snug-fitting costumes, no superheroes would be wearing boxers—but what about during their downtime? Wolvie strikes me as the boxers type, and the only excuse for Cyke's bad mood (other than that Jean and Emma thing) has got to be the mother of all wedgies (due to the briefs he's wearin'). Now, for you boys wondering just what's under the gals' skirts (or really tight pants)? Emma's probably not wearin' *anything* (that naughty, naughty girl)!

To judge for yourself who's wearing what, here is the criteria:

Attitude: Badass boys are boxer boys, and the good guys usually wear briefs.

Budget: If Emma is wearing something, you know it's gonna be expensive.

For the guys, the choices are boxers, briefs or nature's best option. The gals have more freedom of choice—briefs, hi-cut (a.k.a. bikini), thong, mini-boxers (a.k.a. boy's cut) and nature's best option. Now, the rules aren't set in stone and there are exceptions to every rule. You probably know the characters better than me, so let me know what you think, and don't forget to have comic writers chime in as well. All of fandom wants to know!

KARALEE
ultistarmon@hotmail.com

I wonder...I've always been a briefs man myself, but I've been thinking of making the switch to boxers. Does this mean that I'm about to turn evil?

you're missing out on some really great talent that should be exposed to the *general* populace! Especially talents like Robert Kirkman, the writer of a million books over at Image—that man not only writes lots of books, he writes them incredibly well!

Bottom line: We all want comics to succeed, right? Well, stop doing the umpteenth article on how great Bendis, Moore and Johns are, and look forward to the next generation!

JEREMY DALE
Muncie, IN

Funny you should bring up Robert Kirkman and *Invincible*...flip on over to our Book of the Month write-up on p. 106, and all your desires will be fulfilled.

Never let it be said that *Wizard* doesn't listen to the voices of the little guys!

Dear Wizard,

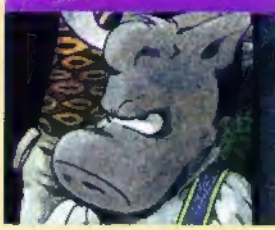
In March 2004, a milestone in the history of comic books will come to an end. With issue #300 of *Cerebus*, fans will see the conclusion of a story started almost 30 years ago! With monthly books today constantly being "relaunched" and creators jumping from book to book, a creator such as Dave Sim should be singled out for recognition from the comics community for his work. This is a man who decades ago had a vision to do a 300-issue story about the life of an aardvark. Through good times and bad he never stopped.

I feel *Wizard* should have a feature about *Cerebus* and its creator. The history, the story and how other creators feel about the end of the series can be some of the things that I feel readers will want to read. Even better, let Cerebus have the cover that month. Give Wolverine the month off.

BRAD DADE
Essex, Ontario, Canada

DIDJA KNOW?

Ceator Dave Sim will allow Cerebus to appear in any creator-owned comic.



An aardvark on the cover of *Wizard*? Stranger things have certainly happened. (Remember the delectable Cookie O'Puss who showed up on the cover of *Wizard* #140?) But as for a Dave Sim feature? Here are two magical words: *Wizard Edge*!

That's right, we'll be unveiling a Dave Sim Q&A that touches on the end of the *Cerebus* era, his controversial opinions and what fans can expect from the creator next. And it's even on sale March 17!

Historical perspective and in-depth reporting? Never let it be said that we're all about fart jokes and boobs!!

Magic Words,

Does Power Girl have the biggest rack in the DC Universe? And who holds this distinction in the Marvel Universe? I seriously want to know this...I need to know.

RYAN MAHON
Raleigh, NC

Never mind. Evidently, we're still all about the boobs.

Seems as good a note to end on as any. Go now, and use the next 30 days to come up with original ways to incorporate the word "boobs" into everyday conversation.

Or just write some more letters—whichever you prefer.

Boobs on the brain,

Richard Ho

Staff Writer Richard Ho thinks Power Girl has a dynamite personality.

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THE DEVIL & JOE QUESADA

Marvel E-I-C pulls double duty on new 'DD' mini-series

DEVIL'S ADVOCATE Joe Quesada writes and draws a five-issue mini-series called *Daredevil: Father* launching in April.

If you ask Joe Quesada about his newest gig, he'll tell you the devil made him do it.

After a four-plus-year absence from *Daredevil*, a title he and writer Kevin Smith (*Green Arrow*) propelled from obscurity to the top 10 of Diamond's sales charts, Quesada will return solo to the Man Without Fear in April with a five-issue mini-series titled *Daredevil: Father*.

While Quesada couldn't shout down the little devils on his shoulder—in the form of Smith and current *Daredevil* scribe Brian Michael Bendis—telling him he had to do the story, it did take some convincing for the artist, who turned writer with stints on *Iron Man* and his current series *NYX*, to actually pen a Daredevil tale.

"I verbally pitched this story to Bendis, Kevin and [Marvel Knights Editor] Axel [Alonso], and they all said, 'If you don't tell this story, you're stupid,'" relayed Quesada. "That was really what pushed me at the end."

According to the Marvel editor-in-chief, *Father* will make some startling changes in Daredevil's status quo, as the Hell's Kitchen hero takes on a serial killer during one of New York's hottest summers in recent history.

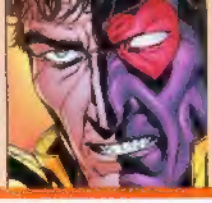
"It's coming upon the anniversary of Matt's father's death and he's being plagued by recurring memories of his father and what those memories mean to him and the lessons they carried," explained Quesada. "Has he really taken anything from those lessons? The combination of the heat and the pressure to keep Hell's Kitchen crime free is really getting to Matt; he's suffering from nightmares and more importantly, blackouts. To top things off, there's a series of murders occurring in the city that has everyone perplexed."

DIDJA KNOW?

Joe Quesada rendered himself and other comic greats into Karen Page's funeral scene in *Daredevil* (v. 2)#8.

Since the serial killer at the heart of the story isn't stalking his prey inside

Aqua-impacted Passover matzoh too much for aquatic gentile. "Kill me," says Atlantean monarch...page 210



Obscure hero gets big break Jack of Hearts joins Avengers, dies... page 240

THEY SAID IT...

"They all said, 'If you don't tell this story, you're stupid.'"

QUESADA, ON INPUT FROM CREATORS

the borders of Hell's Kitchen, Quesada said DD isn't that concerned with the crimes. But according to Quesada, who's already written the entire series and recently started penciling the first issue, maybe the crimson-clad hero should be worried.

"For several reasons, these murders don't really concern Matt, but maybe that's because he's closer to them than even he knows," teased the scribe. "The basic gist of the story is that Matt has become more and more obsessed with the memory of his father of late, and how the father/son relationship they had affects him today as a man and what he's ultimately become. Let's just say that when we're done, you'll never look at DD/Matt the same way again."

While Quesada plans to use the mainstays of Daredevil's supporting cast, the writer/penciler, who's often spoken about how important it is to create new characters, said he'll be taking his own advice and debuting a host of new faces in *Father*.

"I've decided to create a couple of new characters for Daredevil and really the entire Marvel Universe," said Quesada. "We actually get to meet a number of new cast members, who will either be carried off into the ongoing series, or not, but that's up to Bendis. I won't shove them down his throat. Heck, there is even a wonderful new love interest for Matt that can be spun off into the regular series. We also get to meet a bunch of new superheroes or a new superhero team, depending on how you look at it. There's going to be all sorts of new folks running around the series; you're going to need a scorecard."

New characters won't be the only changes either; Quesada—the artist who helped define Daredevil's current look—will also tweak DD's costume in the new series. And while Quesada won't go as far as calling the new look a costume change, he did admit that fans can expect a very different DD by the time the mini-series ends.

YELLOW FEVER While not as dramatic as changing from yellow to red, Daredevil does get a costume tweak in *DD: Father*.

"Let's just say that a situation arises that Daredevil has to take care of during the course of this series that forces him to change his approach," said Quesada. "He has to change his gear a little bit and he figures out that there's more than one way to skin a cat. He realizes that he has to go out and take care of some pressing business that requires more than a red leotard, so he gears up for it. This won't be a return to the old armor costume either. I hesitate to call it a new costume; it's a new look for a short while in this series." ■ **MIKE COTTON**

Devilish Duo

Kevin Smith and Joe Quesada mull over new projects

QUESADA

SMITH

A re-teaming of fan-favorite writer Kevin Smith and superstar artist Joe Quesada might be closer than you think.

Ever since Smith and Quesada brought Daredevil back from obscurity under the Marvel Knights banner in an eight-issue arc that moved DD from the #97 spot to the #10 position on the Top 100 list of comic sales in November of 1998, fans have begged for the busy writer/director and Marvel editor-in-chief to team up again. While the two haven't found time to work together yet, Quesada said he and Smith recently talked about another project together.

"Kevin and I had a very, very cool conversation about doing what we did with Daredevil with another underused Marvel character, who's just sitting there, waiting to be used," revealed Quesada. "We're thinking that could be something for next year or the year after. We'll see how it goes, because it's really up to Kevin's schedule; he likes to waste his time doing those silly motion picture things. I've also spoken to another very prominent writer about doing something next year so we'll see how it goes."

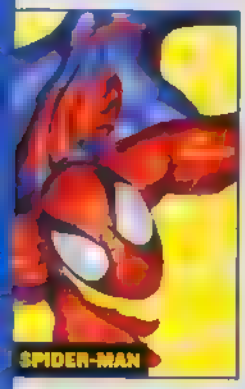
Smith also confirmed that he and Quesada have hatched a plan to reinvigorate an out-of-circulation Marvel hero. And while the writer wouldn't reveal who the character is, he couldn't mask how excited he was to get back to work with his former partner.

"Joe and I talked about doing a book in which we'd do for some lower-tier character what we did for Daredevil with 'Guardian Devil,'" explained Smith. "Because, you've gotta remember, when we were on the book, the sales were in the toilet. Joe hit me with the character, and I immediately said 'yes.' When we finally get to it, the fans are gonna think we're either crazy or stupid." ■ **MC**

SMITH, QUESADA, DIETZ

THE BUZZBIN

MARVEL Big summer events used to be the status quo at Marvel and it looks like they're coming back. Marvel's been holding top secret meetings with a number of high-profile writers about a huge mini-series for 2004 that would drastically alter the Marvel Universe.



SPIDER-MAN Skottie Young may get another chance to tackle Spider-Man—and this time, it won't be within the confines of the Marvel Mangaverse. The former *Legend of the Spider-Clan* artist is developing a regular Spider-Man project that just might get off the ground in 2004.

DC COMICS DC plans to release a new *Manhunter* ongoing series in August 2004, starring an all-new female Manhunter! Rumor has it that the origin of this character will be tied to this summer's DC mega-event, *Identity Crisis*. Marc Andreyko and Jesus Saiz are attached as the creative team.

AVENGERS Although Chuck Austen (*Uncanny X-Men*) is just beginning his stint as the writer of *Avengers*, the scribe says he only plans to do about two arcs of the series. Marvel already has another top-tier writer lined up though, and while no one's saying who it is, sources hint it'll be a very surprising choice.

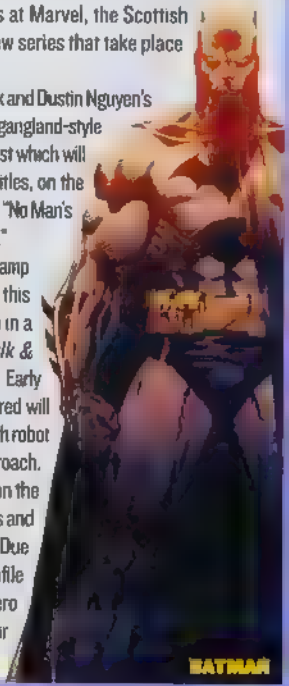
ENNIS & DILLON The acclaimed *Preacher* creative team of Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon re-team for a massive black-and-white Vertigo maxi-series called *City Lights* in July. Tentatively set for 20 issues, the story takes the form of an intense semi-autobiographical look at life growing up in Northern Ireland, giving readers an insight into the creators' lives and offering something completely different than their over-the-top *Preacher* fare.

MARK MILLAR *Ultimates* writer Mark Millar takes his first dip in the Marvel Universe with his Marvel Knights *Spider-Man* series (see preview p. 74), but reportedly it won't be his last. According to numerous sources at Marvel, the Scottish writer's already planning two new series that take place in the regular Marvel Universe.

BATMAN Following Judd Winick and Dustin Nguyen's six-issue run on *Batman*, look for a gangland-style crossover event to kick off in August which will entangle the entire family of Bat-titles, on the scale of previous summer events like "No Man's Land" and "Bruce Wayne: Fugitive."

METAL MEN Look for DC's revamp train to pick up more passengers this summer, as the Metal Men return in a new series by Evan Dorkin (*Milk & Cheese*) and Mike Allred (*X-Statix*). Early word suggests that Dorkin and Allred will ditch the "human spirits infused with robot bodies" for a completely fresh approach.

DEVIL'S DUE Following hot on the heels of their new publishing status and alliances with other studios, Devil's Due is in talks with numerous high profile writers about launching a superhero line in late 2004 to supplement their hit licensed comics.



IT'S UNCANNY!

Chris Claremont's once, twice, three times the writer on Marvel's flagship X-title

For Chris Claremont, the third time might be the charm. After a whopping 17-year stint on *Uncanny X-Men* and a brief return in 2000, the scribe, who many credit with redefining the mutant team, will return to the pages of *Uncanny X-Men* for a third go-round this May as part of Marvel's celebration of Claremont's 30-year anniversary writing the Merry Mutants.

Claremont will be joined on *Uncanny* by artist Alan Davis (*JLA: The Nail*), who is no stranger to Marvel's mutants, having penciled a lengthy run on the first *Excalibur* series and a smattering of *Uncanny* issues. The reunion with Davis has been a goal of Claremont's for years, the writer notes.

"Tailoring a story to him just means coming up with really good ideas," explained Claremont. "He's one of the few artists who can do phenomenal characterization and widescreen spectacles."

Aside from the creative shakeup, Claremont hopes to tweak the X-Men roster, bringing over *X-Treme X-Men* mainstays Storm, Sage and Bishop when *X-Treme* ends with issue #46. But there'll be more to the new lineup than moving characters, including some unexpected additions.

"There will be some surprises, and some that will make people's heads explode," boasted Claremont.

In addition to *Uncanny*, this May Claremont and *X-Treme* artistic partner Igor Kordey will re-launch *Excalibur*, a Britain-based mutant team that was a mainstay of the X-books for over a decade. The new series spins out of writer Grant Morrison's final arc on *New X-Men*. While mum on the final cast, Claremont did confirm Archangel as a member. The book will also place the focus squarely on the X-Men's founder, Professor X.

"What it allows me to do is something I've wanted for awhile: move Xavier to center stage," noted Claremont. "And *Excalibur* is Charlie's book. This is *the* core book."

■ ALEX SEGURA JR.

TRIVIA TIME

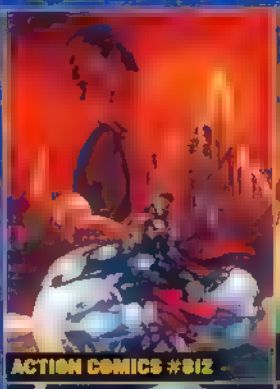
1. Polar Boy	A. Dr. Louise Lincoln
2. Iceman	B. Leonard Snart
3. Killer Frost	C. Brek Bannin
4. Captain Cold	D. Bobby Drake

WORK IN PROGRESS

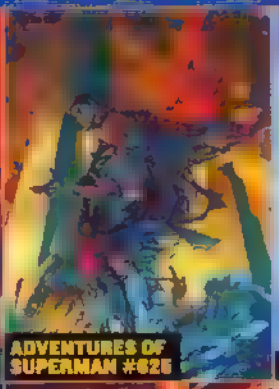
MICHAEL TURNER

Artist Michael Turner single-handedly [illegible] the [illegible] comic industry.

Never known for [illegible] one of the most prolific pencillers in comics, Turner has been trading sleep for success recently, pulling all-nighters to finish six covers set to debut in February, this on top of his own workload for his newly formed company, Aspen Entertainment. Working long hours at the drawing table as well as co-writing the monthly issues of the core Superman books, Turner says the payoff is well worth the lost hours in bed. "I gave up sleep," Turner admits in jest. "My work day is from about 10 in the morning about 4 a.m. Sometimes I go to bed early. Sometimes I am there until 7. Every day is an adventure, and I am having a blast with all the different characters. Variety is the spice of life!" Here's a look at everything Turner's producing for the month of February. MC

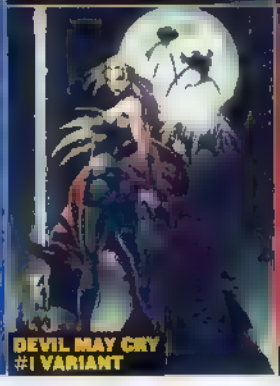


ACTION COMICS #812

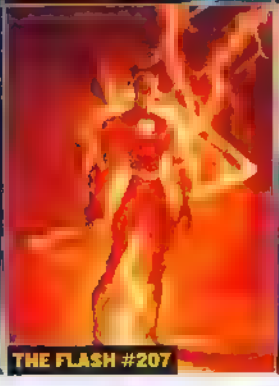


ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN #625

ASPEN SKETCHBOOK



DEVIL MAY CRY #1 VARIANT



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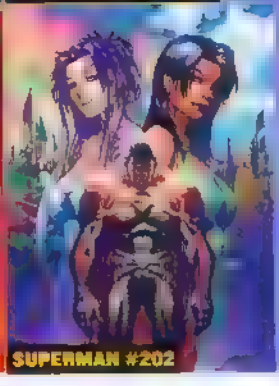

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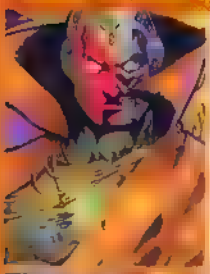
HEAT INDEX

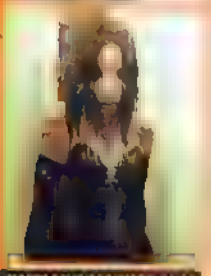


EXILES #38-#39 (Marvel) Chuck Austen crafts his coolest story ever with "King Hyperion," starring Weapon X (the evil Exiles)! An alternate reality Hyperion (played as a Superman-like bastard) blasts the Weapon X Vision to bits and hooks up with a slutty Ms. Marvel on the side, but his own mission remains clear: take over the world with or without his teammates!

SUPERMAN BATMAN - 4 (DC) If you had told us a few years ago that Hawkman and Captain Marvel would give Superman and Batman a run for their money in an all-out brawl, we would've laughed in your face! But after seeing the two JSAers slap around the World's Finest like crash test dummies using their own teamwork against them, we're convinced!

RYAN BENJAMIN (Dark Horse) In Dark Horse's *Star Wars Infinities—Return of the Jedi*, Benjamin's renderings look so good, you'll think he's the next coming of a Jedi! The Force is strong in Benjamin, whether he's doing Luke in meditative repose or space-spanning panels of the new Death Star being built. And his Leia? Hotter than the sun-scorched surface of Tatooine!

WANTED #1 (Top Cow) In this tale of villains who've got the world by the balls, The Cow lets *Ultimates* scribe Mark Millar run loose in their world and he f--ks it up! The Scottish writer goes a little blue for this one, and by blue we mean he lets the sex and violence rip like a supervillain Tarantino flick. Put that in your nose and snuff it. Scarface!



NYX #3 (Marvel) When it comes to the hottest chicks in comics, artist Josh Middleton delivers every month—and gets our blood boiling! Flip to the last page of this issue and check out the splash of the mysterious prostitute (sporting adamantium claws, just like a certain Canuck) to see why she's the best there is at what she does...which is leave us drooling.

I AM LEGEND (IDW) Hell, we couldn't even sleep a wink after reading IDW's adaptation of Richard Matheson's novel, illustrated by Elman Brown and scripted by noted horror maven Steve Niles (*30 Days of Night*). This tale of a lone man slaying vampires by day and praying for his life at night was scarier than seeing Michael Jackson with his mask off!

LADY DEATH SETS OUT ON 'WILD HUNT'

With his latest Lady Death project, writer Brian Pulido went crazy like a Fox...TV show, that is.

"I really like Fox's '24,' explained Pulido. "Each season jumps forward in time and it's cool to see how the characters progress, change and transform. I wanted to apply that formula to Lady Death so I could surprise readers."

For *Lady Death: The Wild Hunt*, a three-issue mini-series shipping from CrossGen (#1 of which hits stores March 24, coincidentally enough), Pulido borrowed the story framing device from the hit TV series to propel events in the comic one year ahead. In the span of that year, the human/Eldritch hybrid Hope (a.k.a. Lady Death) greatly increased her command of magic as well as her fighting skills. And she'll need them to battle her paternal family side, the Eldritch, in their mission to destroy her maternal side, the humans.

"The Eldritch view humanity like we view cockroaches," said Pulido. "There are too many of them and [they] breed too fast. The Eldritch fear the extinction of their race and therefore are out to extinguish mankind. Up until now, humanity has done a decent job of keeping the Eldritch out of Europe, but at the end of *Lady Death: A Medieval Tale* #12 all that changes."

But time travel isn't the only surprise in store for *Lady Death: The Wild Hunt* readers. Jumping on board to render Pulido's formula is fan-favorite artist Jim Cheung (*Scion*), who should have plenty of chances to render those magical abilities.

"Jim is a gifted storyteller. I've seen the first issue and it's smoking!" raved the writer. "Jim can draw Lady Death's magical abilities like nobody else." ■ **HEIDI WARD**

FINGER FOOD

Alex Ross is well known for bringing superheroes to life, but for the Nov. 19-25, 2003 issue of *The Village Voice*, he revamped a much bigger icon—and Uncle Sam is in your face about it. According to Ross, "the wonderful thing about [it] is that it's perfectly fitting for anyone at any time, given almost any political climate, because I'm sure we all feel that Uncle Sam could either give the finger to someone else or is giving the finger to us!" ■ **HW**

DCU GOES NUCLEAR

New 'Firestorm' series moves to front burner in May

A conflagration looms over Detroit, and it's coming from a 17-year old Molotov cocktail named Jason Rusch.

Starting in May, writer Dan Jolley (*JSA: The Unholy Three*) and artist ChrissCross (*Outsiders*) light up the comic racks with a brand new *Firestorm* ongoing series from DC that sees Ronnie Raymond's superhero moniker passed onto the newcomer Rusch.

"Jason's life is already pretty complicated," described Jolley, who puts the recent high school grad at odds with his father and in need of money for college. "But when he suddenly, inexplicably acquires the Firestorm matrix, everything starts to spin pretty horribly out of control."

The sudden onset of his super-abilities is like puberty in hyperdrive for Jason, who experiences tremendous difficulty harnessing his powers.

"In one aspect of Firestorm's abilities in particular, the transmutation of matter," said Jolley in regard to Jason's control of the Firestorm matrix versus his predecessor's, "Jason's going to approach the situation in an entirely new fashion, something readers haven't seen from Firestorm before."

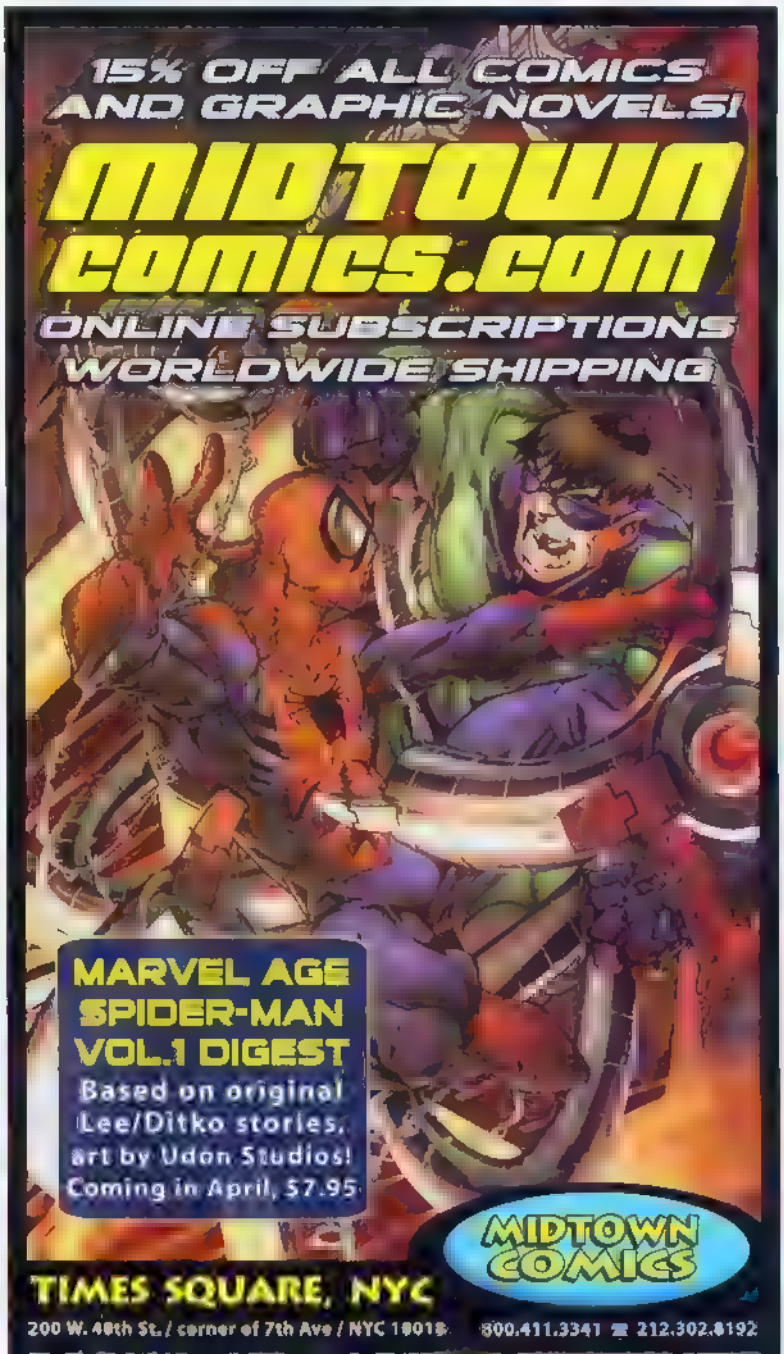
One thing fans may never have seen Ronnie Raymond do as the flame-headed molecule manipulator is tread on the far side of the law as he becomes his own worst enemy.

"Jason's personal life itself is a villain he has to face," explained Jolley of his attempt to make the story a very human one. "Part of that comes from his decision, in trying to get money together for college, to do some 'odd jobs' for a local criminal."

Firestorm's duality has always been a trademark of his character, which is something Jolley plans to play upon. Originally, Firestorm was created when two people, Raymond, a youthful jock, and Professor Martin Stein, a wizened scientist, merged into one powerful being. Jolley is keeping the product, but changing the formula.

"The Firestorm matrix has changed," said Jolley. "The two people who become Firestorm are Jason Rusch...and whoever he decides to merge with at the time."

And if that's not bad enough? Jolley teases, "There's a story coming up that will heavily feature a character whose name rhymes with 'pyre gawk.'" ■ **TODD CASEY**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FIGHTCARD

Celebrity Mutants vs. Earth's Mightiest Heroes

X-Statix writer Peter Milligan says that the five-issue Avengers vs. X-Statix arc, beginning with April's *X-Statix* #21, is "on one hand a powerful analysis of the deepening instability of the neo-conservative cultural imperialist model, and on the other, a titanic slugfest between two very different superhero teams as they go in search of the disparate elements of Doop's exploded brain." We didn't understand what that meant either, but we let Professor Milligan give us his inside take on each of the match-ups.

THE ANARCHIST VS. CAPTAIN AMERICA "We have the struggle between the old and the new, between the black and the white, set in an as-yet unspoiled part of Thailand 'The Beach' meets 'Apocalypse Now,' and the locals get to sell the T-shirt tomorrow."

VIVISECTOR VS. HAWKEYE "Post-colonial convulsions, gender, class and unlikely ballistics, as the kid with boxing gloves on the end of his arrows takes on the homo who goes loco when he thinks of Emily Dickenson. And at least one of them falls in love..."

VENUS DEE MILO VS. ANT MAN "Venus Dee Milo is short of arms, Ant-Man is short of stature, but that doesn't stop them from sizing each other up as they both try to pick up a piece of green left hemisphere."

MISTER SENSITIVE VS. IRON MAN "Sure, they're tough...they're superheroes...but take away their nice suits and what do you get? It's two naked men wrestling in the mud, one with a delicate heart, the other with a delicate everything."

DOOP VS. THOR "And finally to Asgard and the final showdown. Asgard as post-war Iraq. Loki as Saddam Hussein. Thor George Bush. And Doop, the ghost of George Washington." ■ **MC**

'GAMES' ON

Pérez/Wolfman to finish 17-year-old Titans project

The creators who wrote the book on the Titans are finally finishing the one book that got away.

In late 2004 or early 2005, DC will release the hardcover *Teen Titans: Games*, the never-completed original graphic novel by the legendary *New Teen Titans* team of writer Marv Wolfman and artist George Pérez. Pérez completed 73 pages in 1987 before his busy schedule forced DC to put the project on hold, and nearly two decades passed by before it was revived in late 2003.

"For the past 15 years, I've tried to push every *Titans* editor to revive the project," revealed Wolfman. "Both George and I felt it may have been the best Titans story we'd ever come up with. And George had done over 70 of the absolute best Titans pages he'd ever drawn."

Wolfman plans to stick with the original script, so expect a flashback featuring a Titans roster with all the regulars from the mid-'80s, including Nightwing, Donna Troy, Starfire, Raven, Cyborg, Changeling and Jericho—as well as a new framing sequence set in modern continuity and a few extra DVD-style bonuses. ■ **RICHARD HO**

WHAT THE?!?

MARVEL'S MARCH MADNESS

New 'Cap/Falcon' ongoing kicks off six-pack of new launches

Like he does in the Marvel U., Captain America leads a heroic assault, and it's starting this March.

A bevy of Marvel titles will crop up in early spring, as the publisher adds some spit and polish to a few of its classic properties, launching six new ongoing books.

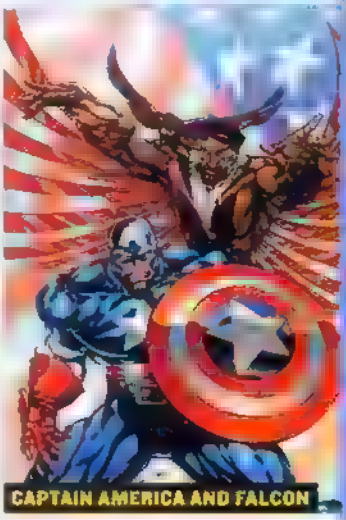
Headlining the new launches is *Captain America and Falcon*, a new ongoing series by writer Christopher Priest (*Black Panther*) and former CrossGen Art Director Bart Sears (*The Path*). The book's first arc will put a new spin on the classic Marvel duo by forcing Cap to face off against his former sidekick.

"'Two Americas' is an all-out action story pitting Captain America against the Falcon," Priest said. "With the clock running down, these two friends must pass through a crucible of plot twists, political intrigue and lies as both men defend the same principle from opposing perspectives."

According to Priest, it was the Falcon's recent appearances in *Avengers* that spurred Editor Tom Brevoort to get the character in an ongoing book. "I'm assuming that Cap himself is the main draw, and the hook is the return to the halcyon shield-slinging action," Priest mused. "We hope to turn them on to Falcon in the process, and make readers look forward to *both* of them."

Working with Sears on his first post-CrossGen project was an added bonus to the series, Priest gushed.

"Not only is Cap the sinewy soldier and major threat he deserves to be, but Bart has gently tweaked Falcon into being more of a hunter," said Priest.



The other new books launching are *Iron Fist*, by novelist Jim Mullaney and Kevin Lau (*Vampi*); *She-Hulk* by Dan Slott (*Arkham Asylum*) and Juan Bobillo (*Mekanix*) and *Alpha Flight* by Scott Lobdell (*High Roads*) and Clayton Henry (*Exiles*). Of the other books launching in March, the *Cable/Deadpool* ongoing series by Fabian Nicieza and Mark Brooks and the *Avengers vs. Thunderbolts* mini-series by Nicieza, Kurt Busiek and artist Barry Kitson were previously announced. ■ ALEX SEGURA JR.

WIZARD WORLD LOS ANGELES

Painter extraordinaire Alex Ross will be a Special Guest for all three days of Wizard World LA 2004, March 19-21 at the Long Beach Convention Center joining a galaxy of comic book superstars who'll be attending the mega-event, such as:

•Hellboy creator Mike Mignola, who'll be promoting all of Dark Horse's upcoming HB projects, as well as the "Hellboy" feature film, which hits theaters April 2. Advance Ticket Holders receive a *Hellboy* #1/2 comic with exclusive movie variant cover!

•*Hulk: Gray* Collaborators Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale will be on hand to plug their upcoming Catwoman project for DC.

•Current *Fantastic Four* and *Superman: Birthright* writer Waid will wow fans with news of his 2004 work, as well as his insights into the industry and his encyclopedic knowledge of comic trivia.

But that's not all! We can't spill the beans yet, but we're targeting a big time Hollywood celeb as our Guest of Honor, and we'll be offering plenty of sizzling hot exclusives you'll find only at this show. Friday night will be an exclusive Premiere Night Event from 5-8 p.m. for weekend pass holders. It's our inaugural LA convention, baby, Wizard's going West Coast style on you!

TICKETS ($20 for 1 day, $35 for the weekend pass) can be purchased online at www.wizarduniverse.com.

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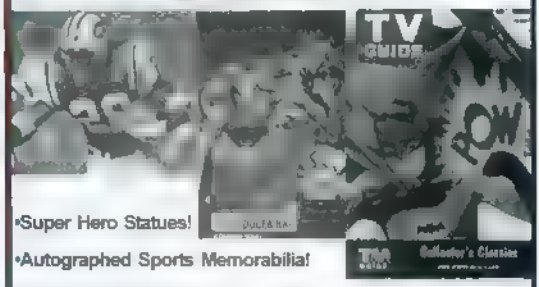

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VISA

'GREY' MATTER

John Romita Jr. renders first creator-owned project

When John Romita Jr. stepped outside Marvel, he fell right into the *Grey Area*.

"I've done crossovers with DC," said the current *Amazing Spider-Man* penciler of his sole experience with non-Marvel characters. "But this is the first time I'll get paid by somebody other than Marvel."

Debuting in July from Image, the Marvel-exclusive Romita Jr. pencils *Grey Area*, a three-part mini-series from Image penned by screenwriter Glen Brunswick. Without a creator-owned template to support the book following Marvel's announcement that its Epic line would go on hiatus, the publisher gave Romita Jr. its blessing to do what he pleased with his tale of Rudy Chance, a corrupt cop stalking evil in the afterlife.

"The guy is about as much of a scumbag as you can be without being a murderer," revealed the artist of Chance, who was killed along with his family in the line of duty. "He's crooked, but he's never killed anybody so he's on that edge of bad and good."

After dying, Chance's precarious moral standing lands him in between Heaven and Hell in a kind of limbo known as the "Grey Area," where souls must prove themselves before they can ascent to Heaven, or fall short and plummet to Hell. Chance is a member of the "Grey Watch," an ad-hoc police force that prevents evil souls from punching through to the real world and infecting the good. ■ TC

CANITBEDONE?

UNSTABLE MOLECULES

Mr. Fantastic and the FF need outfits their powers won't destroy. Solution? Unstable molecules, the clever invention of super-genius Reed Richards.

Unstable molecules can shift in structure to adapt to almost any sort of environment; bonded to the team's uniforms, the FF gets the adaptibility they need.

According to Dr. Joseph A. Vrba, president of Willow Tree Technologies and holder of a PhD in nuclear physics, while "unstable molecules" can't be used to create costumes, super-fabrics aren't as farfetched as they sound. "MIT and the U.S. Army officially unveiled the new Institute for Soldier Nanotechnology," noted Vrba. "We'll see better bulletproof vests or dynamic body armor and soon, other protective suits and specialized 'germ-proof' fabrics too. Rumor has it there's been some success with adaptive coloration, which would be great for camouflage."

Until then, Reed's gonna have to put his pants on one leg at a time, just like everybody else. ■ RH

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THE BIG ONE-FIVE-OH!

WIZARD celebrates '2004: The Year of the Comic Book Movie' in its 150th issue

50 GREATEST COMIC MOVIE MOMENTS

The first time Hugh Jackman popped his claws. The upside down Spidey/MJ kiss. Clark Kent tearing open his shirt to reveal the big "S." We spotlight the 50 coolest spandex movie moments ever!

BONUS: We rank the 25 hottest superhero babes of the silver screen, test your knowledge with the first-ever comic book movie trivia challenge and go in-depth on "Spider-Man 2," "X-Men 3," "Batman" and 17 more super-flicks in production!

PLUS

[illegible]

The must-have list to the hottest comic book artist on the planet today. The 25 best covers, best fight scenes, sexiest heroines and coolest heroes.

EXTRA An exclusive offer for the Jim Lee Millennium Edition, the all-new 250-page hardcover featuring never-before-seen drawings and private sketches!

[illegible]

Wizard presents an exclusive six-page original comic story of the No. 1 event of 2004, as voted by *Wizard* in issue #148. This controversial story will shake the status quo of the entire DC Universe.

[illegible]

In 2004, a new Robin comes to Gotham City. Find out in this original comic story who will debut as Batman's new partner...and she's not who you think!

PLUS

Marvel's 30th anniversary plans for the X-Men and Wolverine, the first Teen Titans Hollywood casting call, an exclusive Kingdom Come Captain Marvel HeroClix figure and more terribly cool stuff!

WIZARD #150
The best issue we've done since #149.
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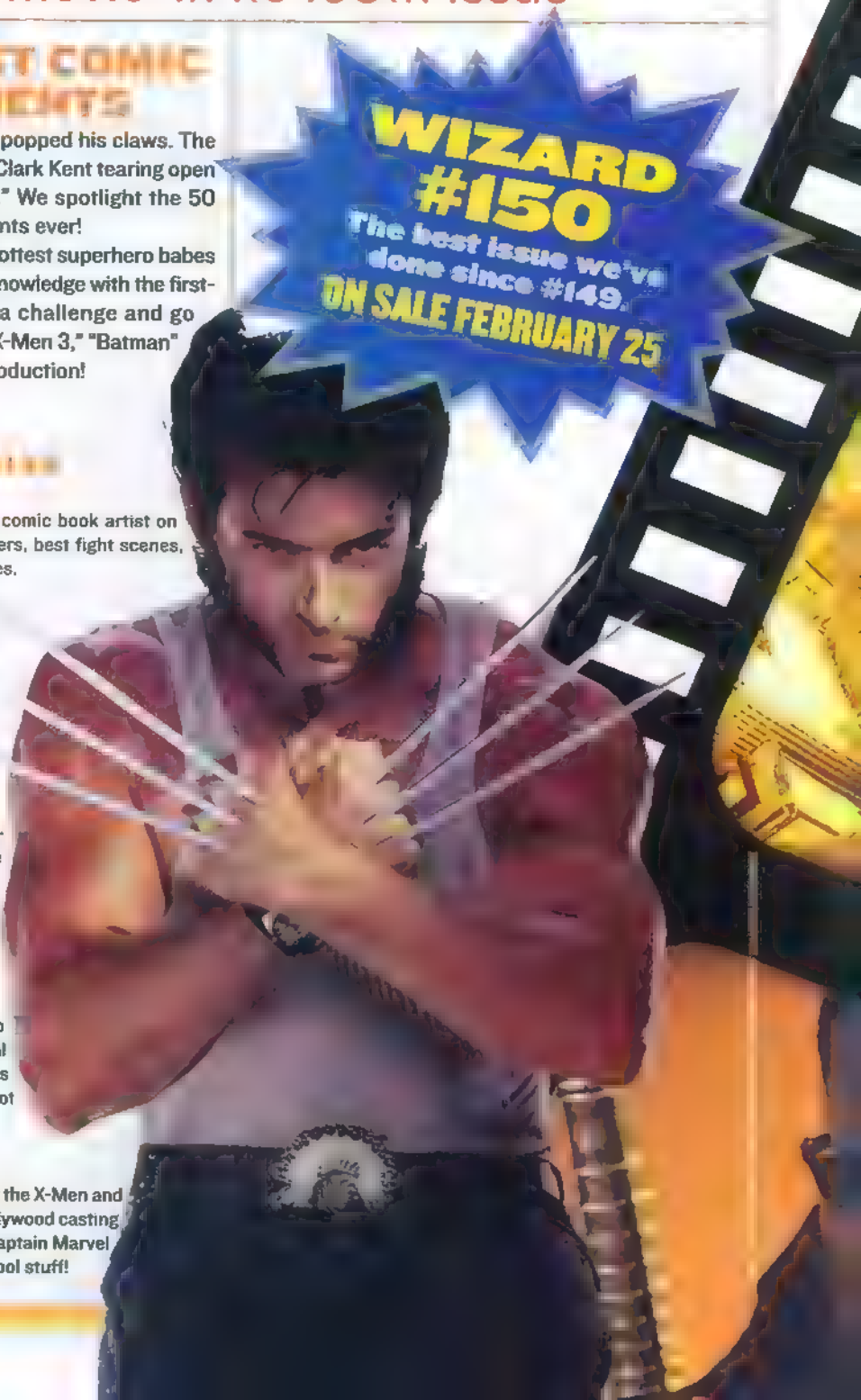


I was a 'PU

GUN THEORY Try to tell Tom Jane he's not Frank Castle. Go ahead. We dare you.

'NISHER' movie extra

Or, how I spent two days ogling Rebecca Romijn-Stamos in a skintight outfit and marveling at the size of Tom Jane's guns

By Jesse Thompson

Rebecca Romijn-Stamos stretches out over the hood of a lime green 1968 Plymouth Roadrunner in a skintight waitress outfit, seductively licking her fingers between bites of a greasy fried chicken drumstick. Her taut blonde ponytail sways as she tilts her head backward and kicks her legs up, laughing gloriously at some mysterious joke.

This is no ultimate fantasy come true, or even a Whitesnake video. It's a sticky Monday on the Tampa, Fla., set of "The Punisher" (due in theaters April 16), and I'm sweating bullets. And not only am I on set, I'm waiting for my own frickin' scene as an extra!

But before the cameras roll on yours truly, I've got two jam-packed days of sweating, waiting, beard-growing and awkward conversation with fellow extras. It's all part of my very own "War Journal," featuring supermodel sightings, a stinky piece of Chilean sea bass and a brawl for hundred dollar bills.

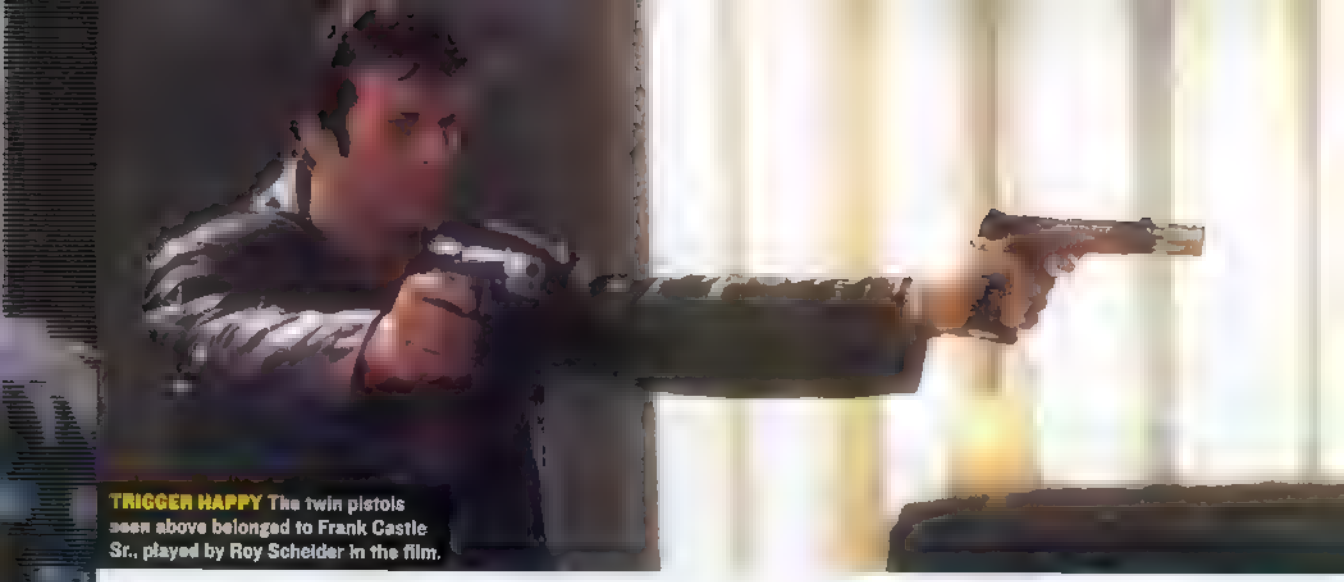
DAY 1 (Sept. 15, 2003)

8:22 a.m. After a six-hour flight, I arrive in Tampa with three changes of casual clothes. No red, white or black colors are allowed, which presents a problem since my entire wardrobe is made up of red, white and black T-shirts. Decked out in blue jeans and a button-down turquoise shirt, I'm ready for action (which I'm hoping is a prop bowie knife lodged in my skull). Filming's already underway, and the warehouse set is located directly across the street from the Tampa Port Authority. No extras are allowed inside (even those from high-falutin' comic book magazines), so I plant myself in a foldout chair in the shade. There's no Tom Jane, Rebecca Romijn-Stamos or John Travolta in sight, but there is one crew guy with a walkie-talkie who resembles a young Kenny Rogers.

8:35 a.m. I make my first extra friend in Steve, who tells me that today's scene requires all extras to act as civilians with cars, pulling into the parking lot of a diner. This worries me since ... well, I have no car and didn't know I'd need one.

8:49 a.m. It's finally go time. Rebecca Romijn-Stamos (who plays Joan) emerges from the warehouse, clad in a skintight blue waitress outfit. As she walks by, she brushes past my shoulder, causing my knees to turn to jelly. She sits on the sidewalk next to a smoking Ben Foster (Spacker Dave), who's all bandaged and bloody. Apparently, the scene being filmed inside is Dave at the hospital after getting his piercings ripped out by mob goons, just like in Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon's "Welcome Back, Frank" story from *Punisher* (vol. 5) #1-#12, on which the film is based. (The landmark Marvel Knights tale took Frank Castle back to his roots and provided him with a fully fleshed-out supporting cast, consisting of fellow tenants in his ratty apartment building.)

9:10 a.m. Me and my fellow extras (there are eight of us, including a hot girl named Sarah, a Home Shopping Network model!) are escorted to the "extras holding area," which



TRIGGER HAPPY The twin pistols seen above belonged to Frank Castle Sr., played by Roy Scheider in the film.

is in fact just a big tent with no air conditioning...and one very stinky piece of Chilean sea bass lying on the ground in the middle. Can't these Hollywood types clean up after themselves?

9:45 a.m. Time for wardrobe! I walk over to the trailer, only to be told by the head costume designer that what I'm wearing is perfect. Unfortunately, that means I'll have to lug a plastic bag full of three changes of clothes around with me all day. But as a former street urchin, I'm used to that.

11:57 a.m. Time drags as we hang outside of the extras' tent. We converse about comics (one extra, Yves St-Germaine, used to manage a comic shop in town) and Tampa's rather large Scientology chapter. We're instructed by a crew member to take our cars to the Goody Goody Diner (where Joan and Spacker Dave will be employed). Since I'm carless, I hitch a ride with Yves.

12:10 p.m. After arriving at the diner (renamed Hooker's Point Diner for the film), we're told to get lunch from a catering truck outside of a church. As I'm reaching for a plate, a crew member stops me and says all cast and crew get to eat before extras. Denied! At least I get to sit in the air-conditioned dining room.

12:41 p.m. As I come inside from getting my lunch (smoked salmon—score!), I notice my table's been stolen by Tom Jane, Romijn-Stamos, Foster and director Jonathan Hensleigh! Graaa! On the plus side, Tom Jane *is* Frank Castle. He's bulked up for the role (his arms look like tree trunks!) and he looks like a badass with the dyed black hair. Note to self: Don't piss Tom Jane off.

1:57 p.m. Still wondering whether I'm gonna get my big showbiz break, I watch MTV VJ Iann Robinson film a segment under the Goody Goody sign for an upcoming MTV News special. A busload of teenagers cruises by, and all of the girls scream at Robinson. Damn it, that could be me!

3:03 p.m. A new scene starts getting filmed...inside the diner. I have no idea what's going on, only that country singer Mark Collie (who plays hitman Harry Heck) walks inside the diner with a guitar case over and over. (I later learn that once inside, he breaks out his guitar and sings a song, while Jane/Frank Castle eats eggs. Hopefully, this'll make more sense on the big screen.)

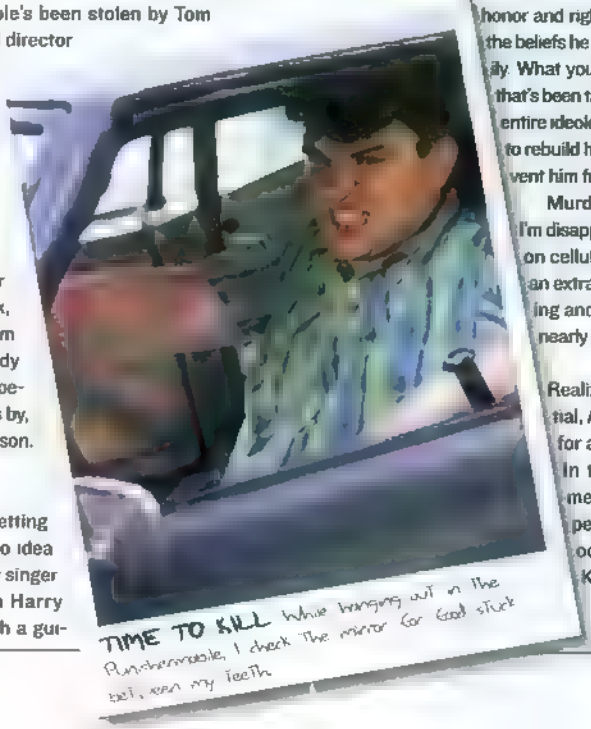
4:15 p.m. Shirtless Tom Jane alert! The buffed-up actor waltzes out of the diner, only to start stripping down from his casual brown button-down (unfortunately there's no undershirt with a skull emblem). Jane could definitely kick my ass, so I decide not to cry out, "Take it all off, Tommy Boy!"

6:07 p.m. This is what it's all about. I may not get to interview her, act in a scene with her, or even get within 15 feet of her again, but the sight of Rebecca Romijn-Stamos, still in that waitress outfit, on the hood of bad guy Howard Heck's ride will live with me forever. As she munches on a crispy drumstick, I've never ached to be a dead poultry appendage so bad in my life.

7:22 p.m. And that's a wrap! Filming halts for the day (without me in a scene), but I get to meet Jane and pose for shots in the Punisher car (a black GTO with a special harness for the driver; it looks like this car will get trashed). I get a chance to speak with Jane, and his commitment to the role of Frank Castle is impressive. "What happens to Frank is unique because of his sense of duty," says an intense Jane. "Take a man that has grown up with a sense of honor and right and wrong, and you shatter all the beliefs he held dear and you murder his family. What you're left with is not just the family that's been taken away; it's his entire world. His entire ideology has been destroyed, so he has to rebuild himself, and there's nothing to prevent him from murder."

Murder may not be on my mind, but I'm disappointed that I wasn't immortalized on celluloid today. But such is the life of an extra—a lot of waiting around, sweating and $69.40 for my troubles, which nearly doubles my daily *Wizard* pay rate.

Realizing I have untapped star potential, Artisan decides to bring me back for another crack at being an extra. In the interim, I bone up on my method acting, break out my old pellet gun for target practice and, oddly enough, find myself craving KFC. Go figure.



DAY 2 (Oct. 12, 2003)

7:02 a.m. I've received my creative direction for my return trip—I must grow a beard. I ponder whether to go with a well-trimmed Sean Connery goatee or the full-on Alan Moore treatment, but settle on a mix of Grizzly Adams with a little Lionel Luthor from "Smallville" grooming for good measure.

Today's scene involves a large group of business professionals, so I have to dress a little older. I may be 24 and three quarters, but I'm cursed with a baby face. Good thing my bristling beard adds 10 years... even if it makes me look a lot like Satan.

7:34 a.m. I won't need a car today, but I know little else. A fellow extra tells me that we're doing a reshoot involving people scrambling outside of an office building for tons of money that's falling from the sky. Shades of the Joker parade scene from 1989's "Batman," perhaps?

7:55 a.m. A wardrobe lackey informs me that the trench coat I've brought along is too light-colored, as I wait for a new coat in the wardrobe trailer, I notice a suit hanging up that says, "J.T. [John Travolta]: Howard Saint after explosion." Hmmm... looks like J.T.'s gonna get messed up!

9:09 a.m. I shoot the breeze with a fellow extra named Neil, also a big comic fan. However, Neil steers our conversation from Kevin Smith movies and CrossGen to how he believes all human life originated on Mars, how he's met people who speak in tongues and how corn is bad for his chi. I pray he's just getting into character.

11:32 a.m. Hey, there goes my old buddy Tom Jane in a black van with a Punisher emblem on the back. This isn't one of the Punisher's road wreckers, but rather one of the vans the crew uses to drive cast members around.

12:26 p.m. It's time to rock and roll, baby! I'm hurriedly escorted from the holding area to where director Hensleigh has set up for the day: a tall office building in the heart of downtown Tampa (which is supposed to be passing for New York). For now, I'm told just to hang out in front of the building with a gaggle of other well-dressed extras.

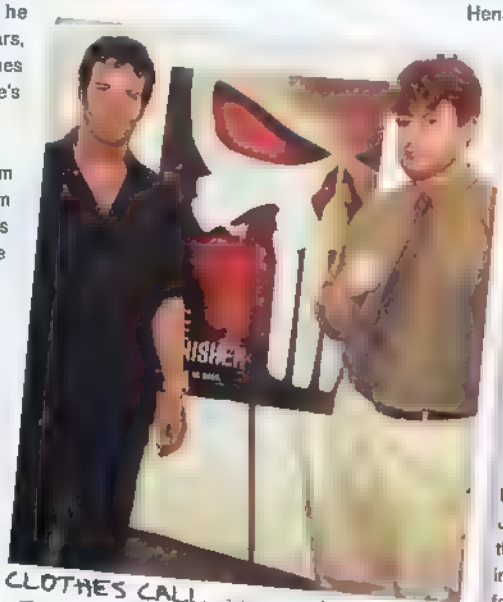
12:29 p.m. All of the extras, including me, take their places at the end of the block—only to come running forward at an assistant director's mark. This is just to test placement of extras, so we're all looking upwards and reaching for falling money that isn't there. When the cameras roll, the fake money will be fired out of a high-powered air cannon. (The scene that leads into this one features Castle dumping a bag of Saint's laundered money out of an office building window.)

12:34 p.m. I'm stuck at the very back of this group, and practice running forward along with them a couple of times. Although it looks like I'll be in an official scene in the movie, so much for face time.

12:40 p.m. But wait! Yet another assistant director plucks me from the crowd, asks if I'm "the guy from *Wizard*," and places me with two other extras right in front of the camera! One is a woman named Cody who looks to be in her early 50s, while the other is a handicapped teenage girl named Jamie who's earned a spot in the movie thanks to a Make-a-Wish/Guardian Angel program. My job is to catch as many bills as I can and throw them into Jamie's lap.

POSSE GALORE Check out [illegible] From Day 1 as I cruise thru on them.

12:44 p.m. The air cannon fires the bills into the sky and Hensleigh calls for background action. The other extras come running, while I frantically grab hundreds from the air, from the street and from Cody's arms, throwing everything in Jamie's lap. The action continues for a full minute before Hensleigh calls "Cut!" The cannon is loaded again, "Background action" is called, and I scramble for all of the fake dough I can get my grubby mitts on, all the while trying to avoid looking directly at the camera. The second call of "Cut!" comes, and Hensleigh's pleased, offering all of us a hearty double thumbs-up. "Thanks guys, great job!" he says, even though I can barely hear him. Automatically, it's sunk in: I'm in a frickin' movie! In a frickin' comic book movie, no less! Even though I'm not allowed to pocket any of the phony Frank Castle cash (disregard all my posts for "Punisher" money for auction on eBay), you're looking at one ecstatic fanboy.



CLOTHES CALL [illegible] but check me out!! [illegible] wearing!

It might have taken 20 hours of sitting on my ass, but I made it into "The Punisher." You won't see my name in the credits, and no, Tom Jane, Rebecca Romijn-Stamos and Jonathan Hensleigh won't remember that freaky, red-haired comic geek that invaded their set, but three things are for sure: I'm in the movie, I'm $138.80 richer and I've seen Mystique up close and personal eating fried chicken. Who knows; maybe even hubby John Stamos hasn't seen that.

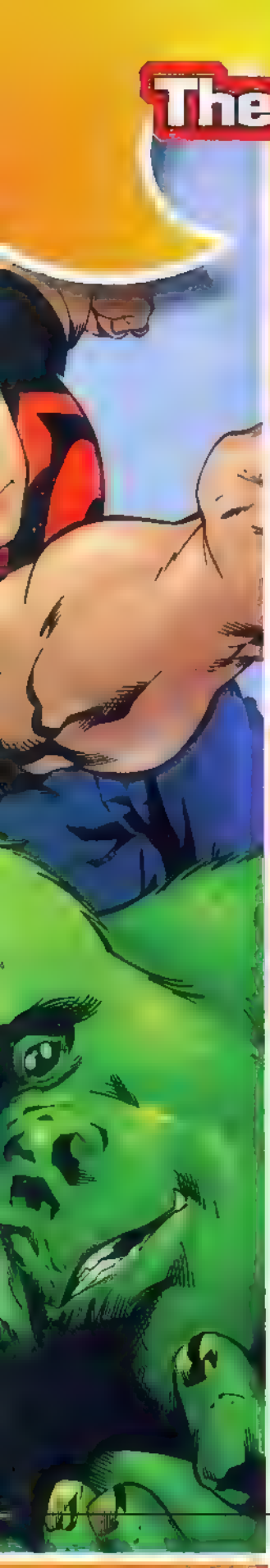
"The Punisher" represented Associate Editor Jesse Thompson's second foray into film. The first? A cameo in the Paris Hilton video.

Want more on 'PUNISHER,' 'BATMAN' and 'X3'? Get the scoop next month in our Special Comic Movie Issue, WIZARD #150!

DC Comics and
Wizard Entertainment
Present:

Teen Titans

1/2



The Origin Of The All-New Ravager!

Discover the origin of Deathstroke's protégé—the Ravager!

Find out the truth behind Deathstroke's new ally and why the Ravager will pose problems for DC's teen team supreme in the future!

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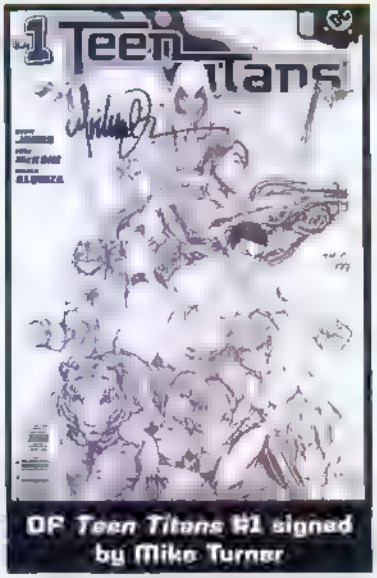


DF *Teen Titans* #1 signed by Mike Turner

TAKE

SURE SHOT Classic *Punisher* comic book covers were used as inspiration for the *Wizard* cover shoot.

COVER

Dodge a hail of flashing bulbs to see how WIZARD's exclusive 'Punisher' cover hit the target

BY BRIAN CUNNINGHAM

Wielding twin Colt .45 government-model pistols, the Punisher turns to face his target with a face full of pitiless disdain. Sweat beads on his forehead, his teeth are gritted. Suddenly, a woman whispers nearby.

"Uh, there's one 'Alfalfa' cowlick on his hair," she says.

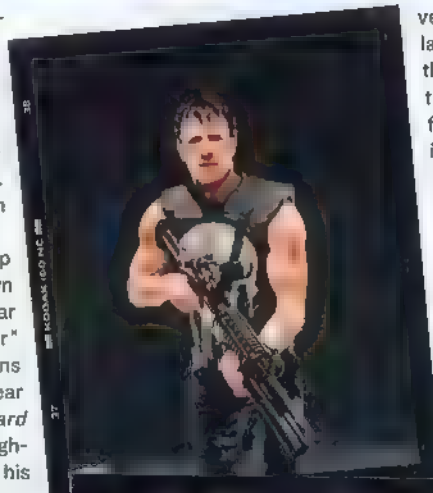
The camera stops clicking. A makeup artist comes in from the side, patting down the jet black hair of actor Tom Jane, star of Artisan Entertainment's "Punisher" movie. Five months before the film opens on April 16, Jane dons his Punisher gear at a photo shoot for this issue's *Wizard* cover. Standing inside Los Angeles' high-ceiling Smashbox Studios, Jane takes his cues from renowned photographer Brigitte Lacombe, whose work has regularly graced magazines like *Entertainment Weekly* and *National Geographic*.

Lacombe, a newbie to snapping superheroes herself, shot hundreds of photos based on a handful of Punisher comic images we brought to the shoot like Steve Dillon's cover to *Punisher* #2, Mike Zeck's cover to the third issue of the character's first mini-series and others.

"So, these are Punisher images that the fans like?" Jane asks as he goes through a black knapsack that could only be his—it's the one with a white skull on it. He nods his approval, filing them into his mental rolodex.

Costume designer Lisa Tomczeszyn, who also worked on "Spider-Man" and "Daredevil," runs through a rack of black outfits ranging from trenchcoats to combat vests, all bearing the signature skull in front. She hands Jane a T-shirt, and after he puts it on, she works her magic by placing pins in the shirt at the center of his back to make it more taut to his torso.

Before he steps in front of the camera, Jane is greeted by a prop man who shows him the Colt .45s and a cut-down version of an M-4 rifle with grenade launcher on its understock. And yes, these weapons are every bit as real as they look, and can fire live rounds—in fact, when not in use, they're displayed in a way to clearly show they're not loaded. Jane grabs one of the Colts, goes before Lacombe's lens and the barrage of photos begins.



BULLET TIME "Punisher" star Tom Jane is an unabashed *Punisher* comic fan.

Each time the camera runs out of ammo, Jane scours the studio's perimeter, searching for something.

"Does anyone have any fire?" he yells to those within earshot. An assistant hands him a lighter, and he takes the brief respite out to the parking lot to smoke his Camels. Anything to get out of the blitz of flashbulbs.

Taking a drag from his cigarette, Jane looks at his reflection in a car window. Not for vanity's sake, but precision. Jane insists his Punisher ring true, and every hair and scrape must be perfect.

But as Lacombe readies for her next flurry of photos, Jane drops to the floor and does a minute of push-ups to ensure he's ripped like a superhero.

"Can we have more sweat?" an assistant asks, and the makeup artist sprays a fine mist onto Jane's face.

Suddenly the man in front of the camera is no longer Jane, but Frank Castle wielding the rifle. His face full of pitiless disdain. Sweat beads on his forehead. His teeth are gritted.

And not a cowlick in sight.

Wizard Editor Brian Cunningham did a terrible job matching Jane push-up for push-up

IN DA

Wizard invites its **15** favorite wallflowers to climb out of the 50-cent bins and come party with the comic book elite

CLUB

You better *not* be on the A-list if you wanna get in this club, hot shot. We went outside the velvet rope to cruise for comic's hippest and hungriest characters to bring the top 25 forgotten playas jonesin' to stomp their boots on the red carpet once more. Some of these heroes and villains had a mere moment of glory before fading so far out of comic consciousness they don't even rate a HeroClix figure. Others had a shot, then another shot and a few more shots after that and just couldn't get past the bouncer because they didn't have the street cred. We scoured back-issue bins, *Marvel Universe Handbook* and DC

are ready to make their triumphant return. This crew of dismissed go-getters haven't been on the scene in well over a

15/RED TORNADO

This guy beat the Justice League

Yep, he single-handedly took down the entire JLA. And Red Tornado did it rather efficiently by simply striding into their meeting hall and "blowing" them all away (*Justice League of America* vol. I #92). Free from any inhibitions or self-doubt while under the control of the villainous T.O. Morrow, the android Red Tornado unleashed his monstrous tornado-like abilities and smashed, crushed and suffocated the likes of Superman, Wonder Woman and Green Lantern. When the smoke cleared, the only Leaguer left standing was the one in the eye of the storm. Maybe that's why Batman would eventually plot the downfall of his JLA teammates in case they ever began abusing their power.

WEATHER REPORT He's got the raw power, the history and the slick character design to roll with the DC heavyweights, so why's this guy always playing second-fiddle to the likes of Young Justice? Bump him into the spotlight by having him rejoin the JLA, or—in a nod to the original Golden Age Tornado's roots—have him join the Justice Society and watch as *JSA* writer Geoff Johns puts his trademark shine on Grade-B characters and issues a storm warning.

FAST FACTS

14/TIGER SHARK

The guy who almost killed Wolverine

Locked in battle with the berserker mutant, the equally bestial Tiger Shark shows his taste for blood. Dragging Wolverine into water so deep the X-Man's eardrums burst, the aquatic Tiger Shark imbeds Logan's Adamantium claws into a coral bed and leaves him to drown an agonizing death—a process made worse by the mutant healing factor that prolongs his fate (*Wolverine* #19 & #20). Sound bad? Tiger Shark does this—and worse—always with his trademark serial killer smile in place. He's a monster who enjoys his work

CUE THE JAWS THEME Let's see the shark in Tiger Shark. Marvel's not at a loss for simple bruisers that can mix it up with the likes of Thor and Hercules, but what it could use a few more of are the bloodthirsty monsters that actually scare the heroes. Sabretooth's ferocity gives Wolverine pause, and Venom's name alone gives Spidey the heebie-jeebies. Let Tiger Shark develop a taste for human flesh, let him take the arm of a grade-B hero or two. Let Tiger Shark be drawn to blood, and the readers will be drawn to him.

FAST FACTS

13/MR. ZSASZ

DC's Hannibal Lecter

Seeming more like a character out of "The Silence of the Lambs" or "Seven" than a traditional comic character, the cold and calculating Mr. Zsasz marks an etch on his body for each of the victims he's killed. What's worse is why he does it: boredom. Born into a life of wealth and privilege, Victor Zsasz quickly grew bored of the empty social scene. After losing his fight to a growing depression, Zsasz tried killing himself, but was interrupted by a homeless man trying to mug him. Accidentally killing his attacker, Zsasz experienced the rush he felt his life was missing, and was reborn Gotham's newest serial killer (*Batman: Shadow of the Bat* #1-#4).

A CUT ABOVE No dyed skin, no coin to flip, no trick umbrellas. Zsasz is the kind of villain Hollywood dreams of, but he's still one breakout story away from getting their attention. Take him a step further in his evolution: now that's he's criss-crossed his body marks from his dozens of victims, have him up the ante by targeting super types. Have him wipe out some of the grade-C clutter from the superhero ranks, or better still, have him hunt a more dangerous game: other super villains. All he needs is a nudge in the right direction, and Zsasz'll leave his mark on you

FAST FACTS

12/STINGRAY

Holds the biggest job in the world

Protecting the Earth's oceans is no easy feat, but reluctant hero Walter Newell does it swimmingly. Newell originally built the Stingray suit to take down the Sub-Mariner (when Subby was all angry with the surface world) and later wore it to help in his research (*Sub-Mariner* vol. 1, #19) But with a costume that cool—and that's a big part of his appeal, how snazzy is that outfit?—Stingray found himself repeatedly drawn into conflict. Be it with Namor (you're not allowed to be a water-based character and not fight Namor at least twice) or his brother-in-law Tiger Shark (see pg. 38), Stingray is the classic hero who wants nothing to do with heroics While he's at home in the sea, this is one hero who's always in over his head

BIG FISH Granted, water-based characters are tough to make cool. But he doesn't always have to be underwater playing canasta with Attuma. Play up his science background and have him hang 10 with other big brains like Reed Richards and Tony Stark. Explore what it's like having a superpowered homicidal maniac like Tiger Shark for a relative. Come up with a hook as cool as Stingray's costume and you could have a breakout star in your boat

FAST FACTS

11/BLUE DEVIL
The other Hellboy

He's a blue-collar horned hero who battles bizarre creatures bent on the destruction of the Earth—and he doesn't work for the BPRD. Meet Blue Devil, an ordinary joe stuck inside his own creation who first showed up in *Fury of Firestorm* #24. See, Dan Patrick was a double threat as Hollywood's leading stunt man and special effects artist. For the movie "Blue Devil," he unveiled his latest creation: a superpowered costume! When the demon Nebiros threatened the set, Patrick put his super-suit to the test. Garbed as the Blue Devil, Patrick defeated Nebiros, but not before the demon hit him with a mystic blast that permanently grafted the costume to his skin. While always looking for a cure to his unique condition, BD's tongue-in-cheek adventures throughout the DCU garnered him a small but devoted fan following that patiently wait for their favorite devil to horn in on some action.

GOOD OMENS Blue Devil was a character ahead of his time. While 1984 might not have been ready for a demonic superhero who would rather have a beer instead of fighting the latest monster, the success of Mike Mignola's Hellboy proves that 2004's fans will accept a hero who goes against the grain both in looks and adventures.

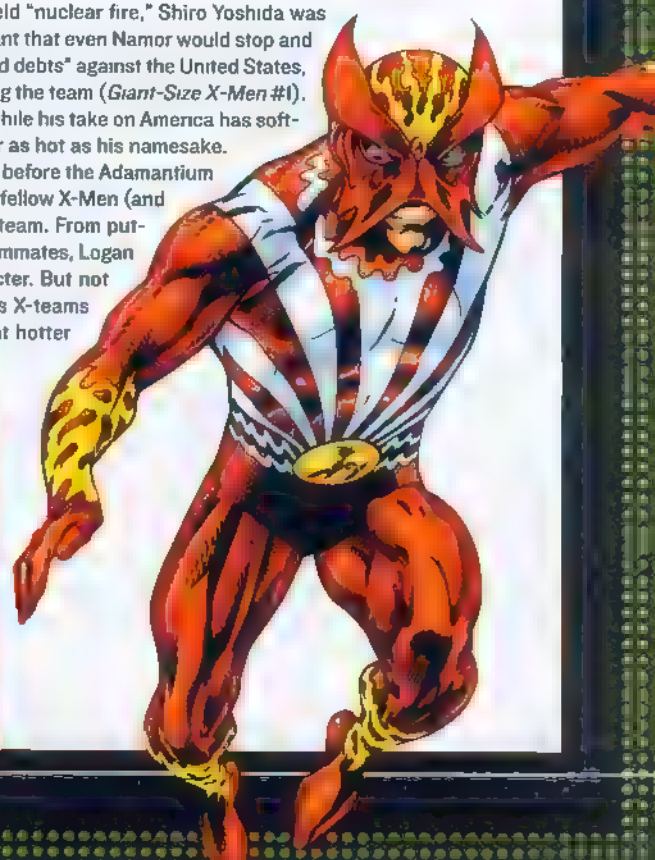
FAST FACTS

10/SUNFIRE
The biggest jerk in comics

But don't tell him that. Born a mutant with the ability to wield "nuclear fire," Shiro Yoshida was a Japanese-born patriot raised to hate Americans. So arrogant that even Namor would stop and say "What a dick," Sunfire came to the States to "pay back old debts" against the United States, and would lock horns with the X-Men before ultimately joining the team (*Giant-Size X-Men* #1). His membership would be short lived (try two issues), and while his take on America has softened a bit, he remains Japan's foremost hero with a temper as hot as his namesake.

HEAT STROKE Have him take Wolverine's old job. Back before the Adamantium bad boy was Marvel's poster child, Logan stood out from his fellow X-Men (and got the fan's attention) by being the biggest a-hole on the team. From putting the moves on Cyclops' girl to literally trying to kill his teammates, Logan was the ultimate loose cannon before softening his character. But not Sunfire. Have the Japanese bad boy join any of the various X-teams and BOOM—instant internal conflict that'll turn up the heat hotter than any reality show.

FAST FACTS



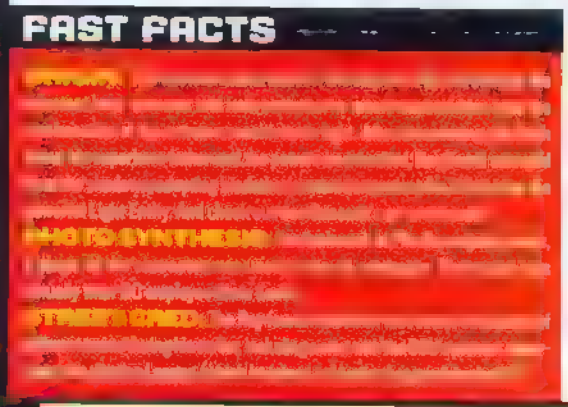
9/THE RAY

The superpowered Spidey of the DCU

Meet DC's version of Spider-Man a wide-eyed everyman who also happens to have the power of the sun By absorbing its rays and redirecting its energy to control the very molecules of matter and energy, Ray Terrill (the son of the original World War II-era Ray) wields total control over nature's most awesome power. He can use it to shoot devastating blasts of energy and create rays of any shape and size, with imagination being the only limit to his power—and as a computer programmer and software designer during his off-hours, the guy's got plenty of imagination to spare!

THE BEST AND THE BRIGHTEST Besides playing up his off-the-charts power levels and his ability to shine destruction down upon his super-powered enemies, let's see more of The Ray's softer side. Ray Terrill's got a down-to-earth quality that makes him endearing and lovable in the eyes of readers. Maybe he could join the new Teen Titans. Or even the newly reformed Outsiders—its leader Nightwing sure could use a kid of Ray's caliber to help smooth out the shadier business that team takes on. No matter how you slice it, from his reluctance to wield such awesome power to his not-so-subtle crush on the sexy Black Canary, The Ray gives yet another example that with great power must come great responsibility.

FAST FACTS



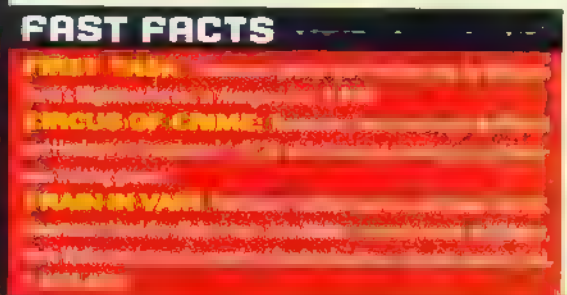
8/TASKMASTER

The villain who can do anything

This mystery man was born with photographic reflexes (meaning that when he sees something done, he can copy it perfectly as long as it's not superhuman, like Thor's strength or flight). So he did pretty much what anyone in the Marvel Universe would do: study tapes of every superhero and villain he could find, becoming a one-man Avengers. Briefly toying with the idea of becoming a superhero, the Taskmaster decided against it when he realized there was no money in it. Shifting his attention to the underworld, this slippery villain started schools to train henchmen for other supervillains, and mastered staying out of the heroes' crosshairs

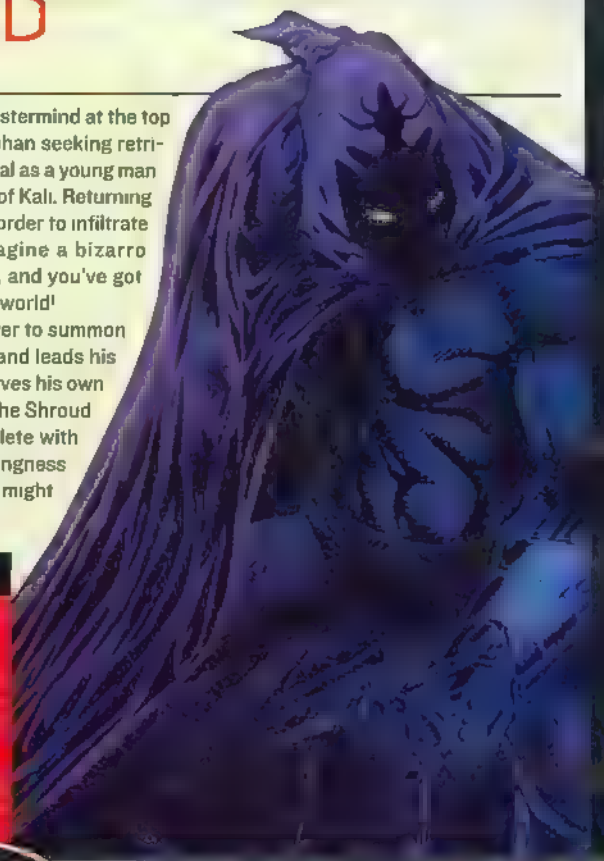
MULTI-TASKING While you don't want to lose what makes him unique (going out of his way to stay out of the way), the Taskmaster should be a behind the-scenes mover and shaker responsible for the elevation of Grade-C Marvel villains who learn new tricks and freshen old gimmicks. That way, joining the supervillain elite becomes no task for him at all.

FAST FACTS



7/THE SHROUD

The ultimate undercover cop



Think Donnie Brasco had it bad? Try posing as the evil mastermind at the top of a criminal empire that spans all of Los Angeles! An orphan seeking retribution for his parents' deaths, the Shroud journeyed to Nepal as a young man to learn martial arts and mystical disciplines from the Cult of Kali. Returning to America, he set up shop in Los Angeles as a criminal in order to infiltrate the underworld and destroy it from within. Just imagine a bizarro *Thunderbolts* crossed with "Sopranos"-style mob drama, and you've got the perfect murky mood for this double agent's shadowy world!

PASSING IN THE NIGHT Anyone who has the power to summon absolute darkness (thanks to the mark of Kali he bears) and leads his own gang of monstrous misfits called the Night Shift deserves his own series. Play up the hero/crime boss angle and transform the Shroud into the West Coast Kingpin. Show us his dual life, complete with the seedy underbelly of his criminal operation and his willingness to commit smaller crimes to nail the big fish in the end. He might be a superhero, but he's not one of the good guys!

FAST FACTS

The Shroud's criminal activities save

Villain Team-Up #5

Back in *Solo Avengers* #3, the Shroud confronts

Night Shift

6/DEATHLOK

What if Cap were a zombie?

In the not-too-distant future, Army colonel Luther Manning is killed in a routine war game and awakes to find his rotting corpse grafted to cybernetic "enhancements" as part of the Deathlok program. Breaking free of the government's control, Deathlok wanders the post World War III Marvel Universe searching for the missing memories of his life. Battling cannibalistic hordes, monstrous mutations and the legacies of the past Marvel Universe, he's the cybernetic zombie with a soul locked on finding his lost humanity.

DEAD HEAD Deathlok needs to go back to his roots. After a handful of revamps, Deathlok was decommissioned from active duty. Stick Deathlok back in his future setting, make it a bleak, disturbing book that not only explores the possible future of the Marvel U, but you can be relevant with storylines that explore the ramifications of politics, the environment and...hey, did we mention Wolverine lives a really long time?

FAST FACTS

in an alternate timeline presented in *Astonishing Tales* #25

agent

In Deathlok's future world, IBM is a key contributor to

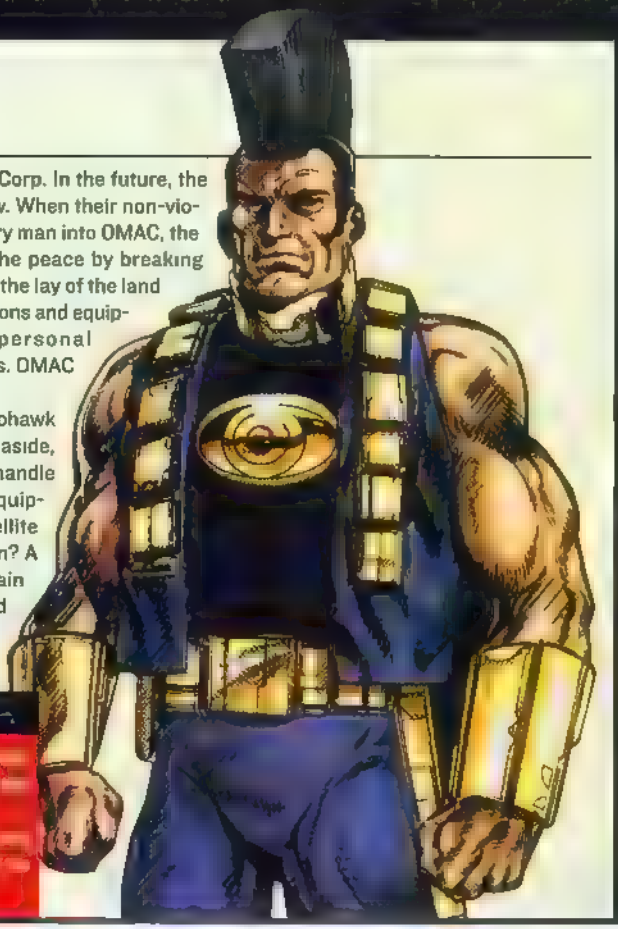
his cyborg body

5/OMAC

The one man army

That's what his name stands for: The One Man Army Corp. In the future, the Global Peace Agency has the task of enforcing the law. When their non-violent methods aren't enough, they transform an ordinary man into OMAC, the ultimate cybernetic super-soldier created to keep the peace by breaking heads. Beamed into hazardous situations, OMAC gets the lay of the land and with a few whispered words says what type of weapons and equipment he needs, and Brother Eye—his own personal satellite—beams whatever OMAC wants into his hands. OMAC is service, just without the smile

I'M THE ARMY NOW Okay, first things first: The Mohawk is a little dopey, so maybe that could go. But bad doos aside, how cool of a concept is this? A super soldier built to handle any situation who just has to say what weapon or equipment he needs and PAMPF!—his own personal satellite beams it into his hands? Nice! Got a Black Hawk down? A stealth mission that needs total secrecy? A supervillain taking over a small country? Just drop in OMAC, and watch him be all that he can be



FAST FACTS

4/IRON FIST

He's Stan Lee meets Bruce Lee

And maybe a little of Tommy Lee's badboy mixed in for good measure. Raised by monks in the Himalayan city of K'un-Lun, Daniel Rand was trained in their martial art ways and became the Marvel Universe's "living weapon." Not content in simply being a badass kung-fu mofo, Rand took the challenge of the Shou-Lao serpent, defeating the creature and pulling out its heart with his bare hand, a feat that granted him the fabled "iron fist." Traveling to America, Iron Fist would join forces with Luke Cage and form the unconventional Heroes for Hire, where a couple of bucks buy you superhero muscle. Armed with the power to channel his chi until his right hand becomes "a thing unto iron," Iron Fist just needs a hand to break into the top tier of Marvel heroes.

THEY CALL HIM BRUCE He's the Bruce Lee of the Marvel Universe (our apologies to Shang-Chi). Make him the most dangerous hand-to-hand fighter on the planet, have him take on some crazy SHIELD assignments where a super agent is needed. Rematch him against Sabretooth (back from *Iron Fist* #14), and see who's standing when the smoke clears. Stick him in no-win situations and watch him slick his way out. To make him hot with the readers, stick this Iron in the fire.

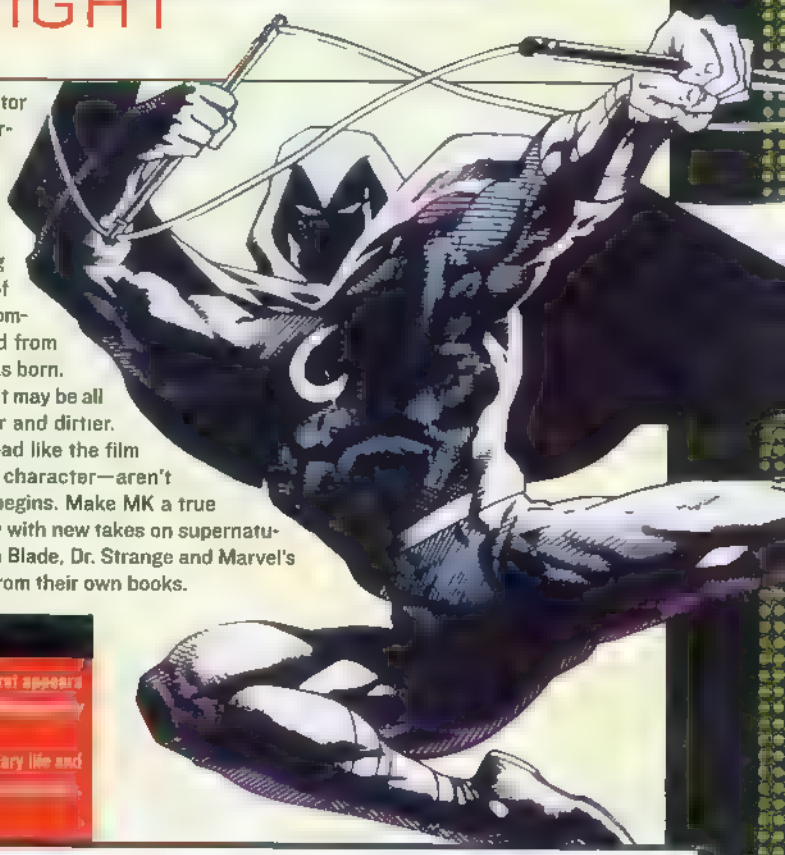
FAST FACTS

3/MOON KNIGHT

He's Marvel's Batman

A former CIA agent turned mercenary, Marc Spector was sickened by the brutality of his boss, terrorist-for-hire Roald Bushman, and challenged him to personal combat. Bushman beat the crap outta Spector and left him for dead in the Sudan desert. Near death, Spector forced himself to his feet and wandered the sands, eventually coming upon the lost temple of Khonshu, Egyptian God of the moon. Healed by Khonshu in exchange for becoming his soldier on earth, Marc Spector emerged from the desert a changed man, and Moon Knight was born.

DARK SIDE OF THE MOON While his suit may be all white, Moon Knight's stories need to be darker and dirtier. Play up his mental instability. Have his tales read like the film "Memento," where the readers—and the lead character—aren't always sure where the truth stops and the lie begins. Make MK a true creature of the night, building his rogues gallery with new takes on supernatural creatures and filling his supporting cast with Blade, Dr. Strange and Marvel's other bumps in the night who could moonlight from their own books.



FAST FACTS

Moon Knight first appears

(Moon Knight #32)

Marc Spector repents from the mercenary life and

(Moon Knight vol. 1, #1)

2/MR. MIRACLE

A tricked-out Houdini with alien technology

Impossible odds and inescapable obstacles have a habit of vanishing when Scott Free's around. Using the New Gods' advanced technology to perform stunning escapes and fight evil as the world's Greatest Escape Artist, Free avenged the murder of Thaddeus Brown (the first Mister Miracle) and adopted the persona of his predecessor

MISS ON IMPOSSIBLE It wouldn't take a miracle to give this resourceful hero the tools to escape into the comic spotlight. Just play up the detective aspect of the character and transform him into a super-powered version of John McClane from "Die Hard," jumping head-first into impossible situations and somehow pulling them off. Also, take advantage of Miracle's flashy duds, which conceal a variety of advanced technological devices, including a sentient computer known as a "Mother Box" that's like the Bat-computer on steroids stuffed into a palm-pilot. The result? A book that's a cross between a techno-thriller, superhero "CSI" and the non-stop pulse-pounding escapades of an "Indiana Jones" flick!

FAST FACTS

Mr. Miracle first appeared in Jack Kirby's *Mister*

Miracle #1 (1971)

Scott Free was a living peace treaty, in order

Genesis. Thus began Scott's life of trying to escape his cruel fate.

'Club' Meds

We prime 4 superteams for a comeback

4. SERPENT SOCIETY

THE CONCEPT: They're all snakes! That should be enough on its own, but this slithering squad steps tighter than a boa's squeeze when it comes to their own—they're the Avengers of supervillains!

THE LINEUP: We'd lighten up the roster to shed Cascabel, Bushmaster and Boomslang, and make Sidewinder, Death Adder, Asp, Diamondback and Anaconda the core crew and watch the venom flow!

3. LEGION OF DOOM

THE CONCEPT: These are the DCU versions of the schlubs from the "Super Friends" cartoon. While a banana peel or roller skate foiled Luthor or Grundy on the cartoon, it would take the JLA, Teen Titans and JSA to stop these rogues.

THE LINEUP: Imagine putting together all the respective arch-enemies of the DCU's greatest heroes—powerhouses, geniuses and all-around unstoppable foes like Lex Luthor, Brainiac, Sinestro, Gorilla Grodd, Cheetah, Solomon Grundy, Giganta and Black Manta (sorry Toyman, you're not invited)—and you've got a near-unstoppable army of villains!

2. CHAMPIONS

THE CONCEPT: These are the super-guys and gals that have their own E! specials and get splashed all over the front pages of *The National Enquirer*. They're the Hollywood heroes everyone loves and they can't get enough of the high profile.

THE LINEUP: We'll go with a mix of heroes who love the limelight: Wonder Man, Hercules, She-Hulk, Tigra, Starfox (when he's on Earth) and of course, Angel, the financial backer and founder of the original team.

1. SUICIDE SQUAD

THE CONCEPT: Incarcerated supervillains of the DCU are forced to perform black-ops for the government with the threat of a painful execution looming if they fail or try to escape. The highly dangerous missions not only mean plenty of rotating (and disposable) cast members, but enough action to keep adrenaline junkies hooked.

THE LINEUP: We'd keep the Squad villain-centric, so gone are the likes of Nemesis, Nightshade and Bronze Tiger. Field leader would be the lethal assassin called Deadshot, and we'd surround him with total psychos like Copperhead, Bolt, Clayface, Harley Quinn and Killer Frost—lethal baddies who don't mind upping the body count to help out ol' Uncle Sam. ■ TC

1/GHOST RIDER

Cross him and you'll burn in hell

Hell hath no fury like a demon scorned—and no demon is as scornful as Zarathos, who, when combined with the soul of stunt motorcyclist Johnny Blaze, transforms into Ghost Rider, the Spirit of Vengeance! Imbued with demonic hellfire, boasting a nightmarish visage and riding a flaming motorbike, Ghost Rider rides in the name of justice, forcing sinners to relive the horrors of their crimes through his feared penance stare!

HELLFIRE AND BRIMSTONE In a world of brightly colored spandex, a leather-clad biker with more metal than "Headbanger's Ball" and a flaming skull for a noggin definitely gets our motors running. With two long-running but ultimately canceled series to his credit, it's time someone did Ghost Rider right. Go with the tweaked, evil origin story from Ghost Rider (vol. 1) #67-#68, and focus on how the character's look is one of the simplest, coolest lookin' things on the planet. Make Ghost Rider a gray antihero like John Constantine, with the moodiness of a vengeance-obsessed Batman or Punisher, doling out hellfire to the wicked in a Marvel Knights or MAX title with more grit than a gravel sandwich (W)

The Wizard Staff never, ever thought it would see Deathlok, Blue Devil and Iron Fist in one piece of art

PAST PACTS

[redacted] After making a deal with Mephisto to save his [redacted] of Vengeance in *Marvel Spotlight* #5

RIDE OR DIE The rebel biker turns renegade in Avengers [redacted]

[redacted] While in the web-slinger's hood in Spider-Man #6 for a throw-down with Hobgoblin. Ghost Rider [redacted] priest off a building for making child porn

BRAD MELTZER

The mastermind behind DC's *Identity Crisis* unveils his true secret identities—law school grad, novelist and the world's geekiest fanboy

WIZARD: You've got a ton of controversial stuff happening in *Identity Crisis*. Did you ever stop while you were writing and think "How the hell are we getting away with this?"

MELTZER: On every single page! [*Laughs*] When I pitched the story, I literally pitched every single beat to Dan [DiDio] and Mike [Carlin]. And the one thing I said was, "Let's make sure they'll let us do this." It wasn't worth jumping into the deep end of the pool if we were going to find out later that there's no water in it. So they brought it to Paul Levitz, and when Dan came back, he said, "Let's do it." And I was like, "Wow, are you sure?" [*Laughs*]

How does it feel being at the helm of such a highly touted project?

Identity Crisis is my love letter to DC. Since I only get to write comics once every two years or so because of my novels, I really try to put all my energy into them whenever I do them. And when you get to play with all the characters you grew up with, it's literally a dream come true. I just kept thinking of all the characters that I was lucky enough to read when I was growing up, and while I was writing, I wanted to leave no stone unturned.

Let's go back to your college days when you attended the University of Michigan with fellow comic writer Judd Winick. Were you guys the comic geeks on campus?

Let me tell you how sad I was in college. While everyone else had the picture of the beer girl with the big boobs on their wall, I had a She-Hulk poster by Joe Jusko. Clearly, this was my pathetic attempt to pick up women, which never worked. In fact, the only person it actually did pick up was Judd, who walked into my room one day and said, "Oh, you collect comics?" But that was how we actually met each other and became friends. He was my best friend at college, no question. We used to sit around and discuss what we would do if we ever wrote comics—we actually plotted out every single fight in *JLA/Avengers*. That's how pathetic it really got! And if you went back in the time machine and said to the two of us, "You're going to write comics," we'd sit there in shock.

You actually lived in Boston with Judd for a year before going to law school. How did that come work out?

I was stuck alone in Boston. I had deferred law school, so I didn't know what I was going to do for the year. Judd moved in about a month later, and having a friend in the same city was the only thing that prevented my insanity. And then one day, I banged my fist against the table and decided what I was going to do. I told my girlfriend Cori—who's now my wife—that I was going to write a novel, and she did the best thing of all: she didn't laugh at me.

Give a bit of scope of *Identity Crisis* and all the characters you're using. How do you do your research?

The sad thing is, all of the research was in my head. I've just been reading comics my whole life, and for whatever reason I've retained a lot of that information in my head where important facts should be. So my geography is terrible. I don't know what state is next to Mississippi—but I *can* tell you the entire lineup of the Justice League at any point in time, and the order in which they joined. And when I started researching *Identity Crisis*, I made this whole chart of every character in the DC Universe, along with their mothers, brothers, sisters, every love of their life, every relationship they've shared—and it includes every permutation from Pieface to Green Lantern.

> "I don't know what state is next to Mississippi—but I can tell you the entire lineup of the Justice League."
> MELTZER ON HIS COMIC KNOWLEDGE

Crazy. So were you a DC guy or a Marvel guy growing up?

I was both. I started out as a DC guy, reading *Justice League*, *Batman*, *Superman*, *Legion*, *Teen Titans*—all the mainstream DC stuff. And then I remember someone gave me a copy of *Sons of Origins of Marvel Comics*, which was a compilation of all these wonderful Marvel stories, including the first appearance of Daredevil, the first X-Men story, the first Nick Fury story, etc. That was my first exposure to Marvel, and I just lost my mind. So I started gravitating towards those books. But then, when I was about 13 or 14, someone gave me *Miracleman*—and if I hadn't gotten *Miracleman*, I would probably have been one of those people who left comics behind because they weren't reading the right title.

How do you plan on following up *Identity Crisis*? What do you do for an encore?

I have no idea! I said to my wife the other day that I'm never writing comics again [*Laughs*]. I don't have anything else to say!

■ RICHARD HO

JUDD IN TIME Judd Winick's high praise helped Meltzer land a gig writing DC's *Green Arrow*.

MICHAEL TURNER

SUPERMAN #204

WIZARD EXCLUSIVE!

Superstars Jim Lee and Brian Azzarello expose the Last Son of Krypton to his first taste of doubt and despair

BY RICHARD HO

You think you know Superman—but you have no idea. Get ready to explore a whole new side to the Man of Steel in April as Brian Azzarello and Jim Lee embark on a 12-issue run on DC's flagship icon that exposes the one weakness that has nothing to do with magic or Kryptonite.

Doubt.

"All the events of this story happen after a catastrophic event in both the life of Superman and the people of Earth," reveals editor Will Dennis. "The story deals not only with Superman's reaction to this singular event, but also how he wants to approach his future as a superhero."

The mysterious event that kicks off the 12-part "For Tomorrow" arc—an event that Superman was powerless to stop—will leave the hero unsure of his role as the world's go-to savior, leading him to question and re-examine his life.

According to Lee, "Superman's ability to be the world's savior—a hero who is always there for everyone at every time—is tested after he fails to be there for the one he cares about most."

"For Tomorrow" also marks a turning point in comic history, as one of the most unexpected creative teams of all time unite for their very first collaboration. "Brian is used to writing smaller, quieter material," admits Dennis, who perhaps knows Azzarello's work better than anyone as the longtime editor of DC/Vertigo's *100 Bullets*. "And Jim is used to drawing big, in-your-face stuff. Plus, Brian writes the art direction very loosely with the thought that the artist will be making additions/subtractions as he sees fit. Coming off 'Hush,' Jim was used to working with much more specific art direction. So the trick is to find the balance, and it's been an adjustment for both of them."

While Azzarello's gritty style and dark sensibilities may not seem like a fit for the squeaky clean Superman, Dennis insists that that's exactly what makes the scribe the perfect choice. "The point, as I saw it, was to come at the character from a totally fresh angle," explains the editor. "Which is really hard to do, especially when you think of all the talented people who have worked on the books in the past. But Brian's strength lies in his ability to create believable characters—especially through sharp dialogue—and I think you'll see that reflected strongly on Superman. After reading the first issue script, I felt like I had a much better idea of who Superman is, the weight he carries and what he goes through on a daily basis—and that to me is the heart of any memorable story."

> **"Unlike Batman, who's more of a boogyman, Superman is a god-like character."**
>
> JIM LEE

Of course, Azzarello's focus on the character of Superman will certainly be reflected in Lee's artistic approach to the Man of Steel. "I knew that I needed to go more for the symbolism," explains Lee. "Brian touches on some of the more ideological elements of Superman. Unlike Batman, who's more of a boogyman, Superman is a god-like character—so how do I help reinforce that through the art? Superman is mythic, and he's a metaphor for a lot of different elements and beliefs in our society, so those are the elements I'm focusing on."

Readers can look forward to the return of an under-utilized villain from Superman's past, as well as appearances by the JLA and a few brand-new characters to boot. But at the end of the day, "For Tomorrow" will revolve around Superman's search for answers—a search that's sure to lead readers in completely unexpected directions.

And lucky for you, the quest kicks off right here, as the world's greatest hero seeks answers from a higher authority in the following eight-page preview of *Superman* #204!

SINGLE BOUNDS Instead of leaping tall buildings, Supes tries his luck at a game of hopscotch with the local playground crowd.

BRIAN AZZARELLO JIM LEE SCOTT WILLIAMS ALEX SINCLAIR RICK KAPOLITANO
CASEY SEIJAS TOM PALMER JR. EDDIE HERNANZA & WILL DENNIS

"IT'S NOT EASY BEING ME.
DAILY PLA
"I KNOW THAT'S A VERY SELFISH THING TO SAY, BUT THEN, I'VE BEEN FEELING SELFISH LATELY
"BUT SELFISH IS SOMETHING I'M NOT ALLOWED TO BE.
"PEOPLE EXPECT--NEED--ME TO BE SELFLESS."

"OR THEY DID NEED ME..

FOR TOMORROW Part 1

BRIAN AZZARELLO
writer

JIM LEE
penciller

SCOTT WILLIAMS - inker
ALEX SINCLAIR - colorist
NICK NAPOLITANO - letterer
CASEY SEIJAS - asst. editor
TOM PALMER JR. - assoc. editor
EDDIE BERGANZA & WILL DENNIS - editors

Superman created by Jerry Siegel & Joe Shuster

DID YOU SAY YOU WERE FEELING SELFISH OR SORRY FOR YOURSELF?
BOTH.
WELL, MAYBE THE MAN WHO'S NOT NEEDED DIDN'T NOTICE HE JUST PLAYED TO A NEARLY FULL HOUSE.
HE NOTICED. YOU KNOW THAT DICTIONARY? THE ONE WHERE CLEANLINESS IS NEXT TO YOU-KNOW-WHATINESS?
FEAR FOLLOWS FAITH IN IT TOO.
DO YOU BLAME THEM FOR BEING AFRAID?
THE PROBLEM IS--I'M LOOKING FOR SOMEONE TO BLAME.
AND SO ARE THEY.

GUILT BY ASSOCIATION. I SEE YOUR POINT.
THAT'S JUST IT--I'M WONDERING IF I EVER HAD ONE.
AND IT'S NOT GUILT. IT'S DISTRUST BY ASSOCIATION.
THERE'S A DIFFERENCE?
YEAH, THERE IS, AND IT'S NOT SUBTLE. BEING A COP, I ABSOLVE YOU FOR NOT SEEING IT. YOUR VISION OF THE WORLD IS LIKE YOUR CARS--BLACK AND WHITE.
THANK YOU, FATHER.
DON'T MENTION IT, NIÑA.
YOU HAVEN'T CALLED ME THAT IN A LONG TIME.
NOT SINCE I TOOK MY VOWS, WHICH WAS..
GIVE OR TAKE? TWENTY YEARS AGO.
AND WHAT I WOULDN'T GIVE TO TAKE THEM BACK.

YOU'RE RIGHT.
DON'T REMIND ME.
ABOUT FEELING SELFISH. YOU WANT TO BE ALONE.
LUPE, IT'S THE LAST THING I WANT. BUT FOR THE FIRST TIME, I UNDERSTAND THAT'S WHAT WE ARE
IF THIS PAST YEAR DID NOTHING ELSE, IT PROVED THAT TO ME.
THAT'S FUNNY, 'CAUSE THIS YEAR TAUGHT ME HOW UNBELIEVABLY CONNECTED WE ALL ARE, EVEN THOUGH WE DON'T KNOW EACH OTHER...
...I CRIED WHEN I REALIZED THAT
YOU CRY?
I'M ABOUT TO..
THEN YOU SHOULD GO, LIEUTENANT

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF, DANIEL.
I HAVE DOCTORS TO DO THAT FOR ME, LUPE.
MAKE SURE THEY DO THEIR JOB.

TO BE CONTINUED IN
SUPERMAN #204
ON SALE APRIL 28!

TO HELL AND BACK

Dying to see Mike Mignola's cult classic brought to life? WIZARD takes you to fanboy heaven on the 'Hellboy' movie set

BY RICHARD HO

HELLA GOOD Ron Perlman's Hellboy will need plenty of help from Professor Broom and Abe Sapien (top left) to run to hottie Liz Sherman (left).

Have you ever stood face to face with a demon? It's unnerving, to say the least. I should know—it happened to me last summer.

But strangely enough, it's not the blazing red skin, glaring yellow eyes or rounded stubs of violently removed horns that grab my attention during that first otherworldly encounter. As this monstrous creature stands before me with a heavy trench-coat hanging off his stocky frame, his enormous right hand—made of granite or some other rock-hard substance, no doubt—raised menacingly, I notice only one thing. This demon, summoned from the very depths of Hell to herald the destruction of all mankind, is taking a deep, deep breath. Without warning, he opens his mouth wide, surely about to unleash an unearthly cry of doom...and promptly breaks out into song.

"You're nobody 'til somebody loves you...You're nobody 'til somebody cares..."

As the shock wears off, I find myself wondering:

Where the hell am I?

A strange new world, to be sure—one where a demon singing Dean Martin ranks relatively low on the weird-o-meter. The demon serenading me is the monster-stomping agent of good named Hellboy—or, more accurately, Ron Perlman, the actor who plays Dark Horse Comics' demonic hero in Sony's latest comic-to-film blockbuster "Hellboy," due in theaters April 2. Here, among the charming streets of the beautiful European city of Prague, within a block of warehouses that housed train-making factories in years past, Mike Mignola's beloved cult creation is being summoned to the silver screen. And as one of the first publications to visit the set, *Wizard* has a front row seat for the conjuring.

For Guillermo del Toro, summoning this movie was never as simple as muttering a few choice incantations. In fact, the Mexican director of such films as "Cronos" and "Blade 2" began his journey through development hell nearly seven years ago. Having fallen helplessly in love with the blue collar hero—raised by the benevolent Professor Broom to be an agent for the Bureau for Paranormal Research and Defense—and the gothic, monster-ridden world he inhabits, the director befriended Mignola and shared with the creator his dream of translating *Hellboy* from page to screen.

For years, del Toro pursued his holy grail, lobbying various Hollywood studios for the chance to realize his hellish vision. But everywhere he turned, the director faced resistance—not to mention the monster known as ignorance.

"The studios were all trying to take the wrong route," laments del Toro. "I would get questions like, 'Does he really have to be red? Can he not be a demon?' I swear to God, one of the questions I got asked was, 'Can he be a guy that when he gets angry, he turns into Hellboy?' [*Laughs*] And for a number of years, I said I'd rather not do it if we couldn't do it the way both Mike and I wanted to do it."

Rather than betray the essence of the character he loved, del Toro decided to wait. And wait. And wait some more, until at long last, Revolution Studios and Sony came a' knockin' in mid-2002.

Since then, the project has advanced in a blur, and the entire experience—especially these last few months of filming—have been nothing short of surreal.

Once "Hellboy" received the greenlight, del Toro made the easiest decision of the entire production—choosing Ron Perlman as his leading man. "He was fighting for me to play the role all along."

says Perlman, whose friendship with del Toro dates back to his work on both "Cronos" and "Blade 2." "But he didn't hold out a lot of faith that he'd be able to pull it off. I'm not a bankable movie star, and since it had to be an expensive film, he was going to need a huge leap of faith from the studio. I've never seen anyone as determined, as unwilling to compromise, and who played it as brilliantly as he did in order to make it come to pass."

In turn, Perlman brilliantly plays Hellboy, totally immersing himself in the title character as soon as his makeup is applied. Once on set, the man *is* Hellboy, and looks from head to toe as if he just stepped off a page from "Seed of Destruction." Spotting me from several feet away, the fully decked-out actor walks up and introduces himself.

"Hi, I'm the Hellboy stunt double," deadpans Perlman. "The real guy should be here any day now."

And yet, Perlman's portrayal of Hellboy couldn't be more natural. Lounging in a comfortable chair and smoking a cigarette between takes of today's scene—which centers around a conversation in Hellboy's den between the hero and Liz Sherman, the pyrokinetic B.P.R.D. agent played by Selma Blair—Perlman acts and talks just like a regular joe. Or a normal Ron. "I'm not as red as Hellboy," admits Perlman. "And I'm not as tall as he is. I'm not as muscular, and I'm not as good-looking. But in every other way, we're pretty much the same guy."

Except for the horns, right?

"No, I have horns," insists Perlman. "You just can't see them."

It's easy to see why Perlman has such a great time playing the character. "It's turned into this fun labor of love, because Hellboy is fun," says the actor. "He's this amazing series of contradictions and dichotomies, all wrapped into this huge, red, sexy otherworldly being. He's really delicious. He just f---s with people. That's what he does, all the time. He does it to entertain himself, and he does it because he's a bit devilish.

"He's the smoothest motherf---er to ever come down the pike, ever."

But you wouldn't be able to tell from this scene, which highlights Hellboy's inability to express his feelings for Liz. Unlike the comics, a romantic tension exists between the two mismatched B.P.R.D. agents in the film—a dynamic that's complicated by the arrival of Agent Myers, played by newcomer Rupert Evans. As the cameras roll, Myers interrupts an awkward exchange between Hellboy and Liz, and the two humans leave together as Hellboy crushes a beer can—a creative use for his greatest weapon, the gigantic, indestructible Right Hand of Doom—to vent his frustration. The scene perfectly embodies the love triangle at the heart of the film and offers me my first glimpse at two of Perlman's distinguished co-stars.

Selma Blair adds a much-needed feminine edge to a story dominated by men and monsters. Clad completely in black with a slight goth vibe, the bubbly actress admits that the action-heavy, comic-based film is a bit of a departure for her. "But I loved the world that Mike Mignola created," says Blair. "It's beautiful, dark, archetypal and romantic, and I was thrilled to be a part of it. I didn't even think of it as a career change, just as being part of a great story. And I think this is the only time in my career that I've gotten the guy!"

So who ends up winning Liz's affections?

"Well, I won't say *which* guy I get," teases Blair coyly. "But I definitely get a guy!"

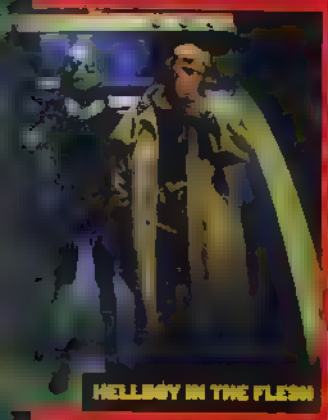
The crew gets something, too—a brand new scene to set up, as filming commences in a warehouse across the street. Entering the warehouse through a pair of unmarked doors, I hear voices ringing from the far side of the building, bouncing off the cavernous walls. The cameras are rolling, and lights are shining on the unpainted wooden beams that make up the backs of newly constructed sets in the distance. As I quietly circle around to avoid interrupting the scene, a loud yell of "Cut!" breaks the silence.

Del Toro directs traffic, and the crew hustles about making adjustments before the next take. Upon further inspection, the wooden beams reveal intricate metallic walls and a sleek water tank on the other side. From behind, a pair of crewmembers pull on some rigging to simulate a floating effect for the recovery tank's occupant, who is currently sitting in a chair several feet away.

The identity of that occupant? Abe Sapien himself, in all his scaly glory.

MONSTERMAKING

JUMP IN THE MAKEUP CHAIR WITH HELLBOY



HELLBOY IN THE FLESH

HONEST ABE "CGI" is not in Abe Sapien's vocabulary. The fishy co-star comes to life thanks to a scaly monster suit.

One of the most popular characters in the Hellboy canon, the amphibious Abraham "Abe" Sapien boasts a visage even more exotic than his red-skinned colleague—and the fan anticipation surrounding his translation to the big screen is almost as intense as it is for Hellboy.

Underneath the stunningly beautiful makeup is veteran creature man Doug Jones, who's well aware of the responsibility he wields in bringing the fan favorite to life. "Through the whole process of going to websites and visiting chatboards, I learned just how devoted and loyal Hellboy fans are," says Jones. "I also found out that Abe is a beloved character—which made me terrified that I'm going to get something wrong! [*Laughs*]"

From my perch atop a desk cluttered with B.P.R.D. letterhead and computer monitors, I witness a tense exchange between Hellboy and Agent Manning—the non-believing FBI agent played by Jeffrey Tambor—over the aftermath of a particularly costly skirmish. Lighting a cigar at the beginning of every take, Tambor flinches at the end of the explosive scene when Hellboy rips a piece of tubing from the wall, sending sparks and smoke into the air.

After the fourth take, del Toro yells, "Very good, print!" and the crew starts tearing down to set up for the next shot. During the break in action, the skipper of this weird and wonderful ship sits down for a rare moment of rest.

By all accounts, he should be exhausted. Three months into a five-month shoot, the director has been shooting for 12 hours a day, six days a week, following a grueling series of night shoots a few weeks earlier. But defying all logic, the director is glowing.

With a friendly smile a constant fixture on his face, del Toro is always quick to greet newcomers with a great big bear hug, whether he's on the first take of the day or the fiftieth. And watching him interact with the cast and crew, you truly get the impression of a man living his dream. "For Guillermo, this project has been his number one passion—and when he gets passionate about something, it's not like an ordinary person getting passionate about something," chuckles Perlman. "Plus, the screenplay is an incredibly perfect adaptation. He nailed the voice of Hellboy, and the only fights I've ever had with him is when he tries to change the script. I've said to him, 'No, you can't fix what's not broken. This is perfect, we need to shoot it exactly as you wrote it.' And I've never had that argument with a director before."

For del Toro, getting the voice right is just part of his filmmaking philosophy. "Ultimately, you go to the movies to meet characters and to go places," explains the director. "The details that I find most successful in movies have very little to do with special effects. They have to do with character and place. And that's the great richness of Hellboy. He's such a unique character. Superpowerful, modest—he's an everyday man, inside the most spectacularly weird body you can imagine!"

Onscreen, Hellboy and company battle murderous Nazis and terrifying monsters. Offscreen, del Toro, Perlman and the rest of the "Hellboy" gang battle a far more insidious foe: fan expectations.

But true to Hellboy's confident swagger, Perlman doesn't blink. "We don't feel any pressure in terms of living up to expectations," insists the actor. "We know that we're doing as great an homage to Mignola as anybody on Earth can do. Guillermo in particular, you couldn't have asked for a better guy to bring this comic to reality. Aside from being a worldclass filmmaker, he's a worldclass comic book fan who understands the artform—and Hellboy is his favorite character. So it's not a concern, because it's done out of pure love and respect for the material."

Fans everywhere will witness the result of that magical transformation on April 2, when the film makes its debut across America. And when you finally get your own shot at staring a demon in the face, remember:

It's okay to stare for as long as you like.

Staff Writer Richard Ho likes to think he should be able to stare at Selma Blair for as long as he wants. Or until security shows up.

Want more on "HELLBOY," "BATMAN" and "[illegible]"? Get the scoop [illegible] in our Special Comic Movie issue, WIZARD #150!

BROOM CLOSET State-of-the-art technology meets old-fashioned bookshelves in Professor Broom's library.

SETS IN THE CITY

MORE MIND-BOGGLING 'HELLBOY' LOCATIONS

[illegible] it's easy to overlook the halls themselves. Which would be a mistake, since the elaborate sets of Hellboy's world are [illegible] the characters that bring that world to life.

Walking through a maze of previously used locations, [illegible] deconstruction, the curious onset visitor can explore Hellboy's messy pad of a den, filled with dozens of antique TV screens, kitty litter boxes, six large bowls of salsa and a bed with Cliffs and SVRs strewn all over. Of course, not everything in Hellboy's world is bright and shiny—[illegible] poisoned by the dank, dark sewer tunnels being constructed in an adjacent warehouse. Deep within the tunnel's entrances, where Hellboy and his enemies Sammael will engage in a high-octane chase scene, the crew works on the floor of a large shower room, [illegible] the wall hints at a vintage Hellboy romp.

And then there's Prague itself, a classic European city with a magical, medieval feel that provides the perfect setting for this gothic tale. "There's a great sense of culture in the architecture," says del Toro. "And [illegible] details from that's very beautiful and old world." ■ Fin

TOM WELLING

TV's 'Smallville' super-teen cries foul on Lana Lang's new crush and explains why you'll never see him as Superman

What's it like to play the ultimate superhero?

Awesome. I get to do a lot of cool things that I always wished I could do. I get to run with super-speed, I get the X-ray vision. I get to shoot people with heat vision and now, I have super-hearing. That's a new one that I got this year.

But you don't get to fly?

I don't get to fly. I'll never get to fly.

Why not?

"Smallville" is about Clark Kent trying to be a normal kid. He's got these abilities and he doesn't know what to do with them. But like all of us, we have to take the abilities that we have and try to fit them into the norm, whatever that is. As we get older, we realize that there is no norm and we're all just as crazy as everyone else. Once Clark puts on the suit and starts flying around, it's not what this show is about which is having this kid [Clark Kent] *trying* to be normal. It changes the direction of the show and it becomes too easy for Clark to do things. By putting on the suit, he's accepting the Superman identity because he does go out into the world with that suit on. I don't think that Clark Kent in "Smallville" is ready to accept that.

How long do you see yourself continuing to play Clark Kent?

You mean, how long do I think that the show is going to last? I think that we have at least three or four more years. I think that we'll go on for at least a five-year period, but I don't have any interest to play Clark Kent in college, Clark Kent at his first job, Clark Kent becoming Superman, Clark Kent dying.

Has anyone approached you about playing Supes on the big screen?

There have been conversations, but it's not likely due to my schedule with "Smallville." **What about personally? How would you feel about taking on that role for the proposed three films?**

Honestly, I can't really let myself get to the question of whether I'd do it or not because it's not really a possibility. I know that it really can't happen. I don't really want to go down that road of, 'Oh man, I could've played it,' or 'No way, I'm not going to play it.' So, if it ever becomes a possibility, then I'll go through the struggle of weighing it out, doing the movie and the TV show.

Have you always been a Superman fan?

According to my father, when I was 4 and 5, I demanded to be Superman two years in a row for Halloween. I think that I had grown so much that I didn't really fit the 4-year-old costume, but I still tried to wear it. I have seen the "Superman" films but I don't remember too much about them. I remember the stories, but I didn't collect the comic books. I didn't really follow the mythology of the character. Since "Superman" started, I've actually made a conscious decision to stay away from that material because we're doing something different before all of that, I don't want that to infect what I'm doing—even subconsciously.

> **"Lana gets a new guy in her life, which I'll have to get rid of sooner or later."**
> WELLING ON UPCOMING 'SMALLVILLE' EVENTS

What kind of perspective did Christopher Reeve give you on Superman when he guest-starred on "Smallville"?

It was kind of fun to talk to him about it and he was amazed that we're able to do what we can do now with special effects and how quickly [we can do it]. You talk about even a year after the actual production of "Superman" stunts; he worked for another year just trying to get flying down and that sort of thing. They really were on the forefront of doing all of that, but his joke was that he didn't want to talk to me much about "Superman" because I wasn't supposed to know that yet. He was like, "You're just Clark Kent. We shouldn't talk about Superman yet." He's a great guy and he, more than anyone I've ever met, really takes the character seriously. He probably knows more than anyone I've ever met. I mean, the details about it. It's a really neat thing to be able to share with someone like that. Just the first time that I met him, it was really neat to look at each other and be like, "Cool."

Are you worried about the Superman curse?

The thing about a curse is if you say that you don't believe in it, isn't that even worse than saying you believe in it and not doing anything? I don't think about it. I don't think that's something that factors in on my decisions on what I do on a day-to-day basis.

Can you tease anything that's coming up in "Smallville"?

Clark gets a new ability. Lex goes crazy for different reasons. Lana gets a new guy in her life which I'll probably have to get rid of sooner or later. Chloe and Clark start to rebuild their relationship as friends and Pete actually has an episode all about him. ■ **JENNY PETERS WITH TODD CASEY**

CLARK BAR Sorry ladies; Tom Welling's groin must be covered by a caption box.

WIZARD EXCLUSIVE!

SPIDER-MAN #1

With Spidey a Marvel Knights member, Mark Millar and Terry Dodson tangle his web with classic—but edgy—foes and a blown secret identity

BY MIKE COTTON

Mark Millar may love sex, swearing, the occasional politically incorrect joke and drunken debauchery, but there's one thing the writer reveres more than any of his numerous vices—Spider-Man.

When Millar (*Ultimates*) signed on to launch a new Marvel Knights *Spider-Man* series in April with artist Terry Dodson (*Trouble*), there were rumors it would be a mature readers-only take on the Web-head's adventures, but Millar says he has no plans to MAX out the hero anytime soon.

"I love the sex scenes, I love the swearing, I love the violence, but there's something about Spider-Man that I think would make that all wrong," explains Millar. "We talked about it and we all agreed it would be a bad idea to have this book be only for mature readers. It would alienate all of the younger readers. This book will just be more sophisticated. It plays with emotions, and relationships are done in a way that you've never seen before."

Millar reveals the story will be centered around upping the threat level of Spider-Man's most notorious foes, including the Green Goblin, Electro and the Vulture among others, as one unseen rogue figures out that Spider-Man and Peter Parker are the same person.

"This one revelation turns Spider-Man's life upside down," admits Millar. "Every time I think of the Spider-Man villains, I imagine them as drawn by [Spider-Man co-creator Steve] Ditko and their personalities just come alive for me. I'm writing aspects of their characters we've never seen before, but it just feels right. I don't want to spoil the plot too much, but I want each one to be as real and as human as Peter Parker. I want to write them all because I want the first 12 issues collected into a hardcover that I can give to people as the ultimate introduction to Spider-Man. [Norman] Osborne's a favorite, of course. 'The Death Of Gwen Stacy' was my first comic, so I'm sure I'm dealing with a little repressed psychological trauma when I write him."

According to Dodson, whose first work on Spider-Man came with writer Kevin Smith's still-unfinished *Spider-Man/Black Cat*, the new series will look just as dark as his previous work on Spidey.

"If you look at the whole [so far] of *Spider-Man/Black Cat*, it turns out to be a fairly black book," says the artist. "I got a good grasp of that [more mature flavor], and I'm just trying to pick up where I left off. This book looks a lot more like the third issue of *Spider-Man/Black Cat* than the first issue."

Millar wants to reassure fans that he won't give Spider-Man the same "extreme" treatment he dished out to heroes in the pages of *The Authority* or even *The Ultimates*. that means no dirty sex.

"The Spider-Man stories I hold with a near-religious regard are the [Stan] Lee and Ditko ones," explains Millar. "He's a classic character and I don't want to do anything to ruin that."

But don't expect Millar to take it easy on the Web-slinger, either. Wanna see Spider-Man's life shot to hell by one of the godfathers of the Ultimate Marvel Universe? Then just read on for *Wizard*'s exclusive nine-page preview of *Spider-Man* #1!

DANGLE FOR DUNST Spidey can hang around in that position as long as he wants, but Kirsten Dunst ain't comin' around.

MARK MILLAR TERRY DODSON INKS RACHEL DODSON COLORS AVALON'S IAN HANNIN LETTERS VIRTUAL CALLIGRAPHY'S CORY PETIT
WARREN SIMONS EDITOR AXEL ALONSO EDITOR IN CHIEF JOE QUESADA DAN BUCKLEY

HEY, YOU SEE THAT LEGALLY BLONDE 2 YET?
NAH, THAT'S A CHICK-FLICK, RIGHT? I DON'T WATCH CHICK-FLICKS
MAN, THAT AIN'T NO CHICK-FLICK. I THOUGHT I WAS GONNA DIE LAUGHING AT THAT LAST NIGHT. I GOTTA GIVE YOU THE DVD BEFORE WE TAKE IT BACK TO THE STORE, MAN
AH I NEVER GOT INTO THE WHOLE DVD THING
YOU SERIOUS?
'COURSE I'M SERIOUS
WHY THE HECK SHOULD YOU PAY AN EXTRA TEN BUCKS FOR A MOVIE THAT COST HALF AS MUCH TO PACK AND HALF AS MUCH TO SHIP AS AN OLD VHS TAPE, MAN?
I DUNNO. PICTURE QUALITY? EXTRAS?
DON'T TALK TO ME ABOUT EXTRAS: YOU REALLY THINK I NEED A VOICE-OVER FROM SOME HOLLYWOOD NUTCASE TELLING US WHAT HE REALLY MEANT THE MOVIE TO BE ABOUT?
DVD S GOTTA BE THE BIGGEST SCAM SINCE THEY TOLD US ALL TO MAKE THE SWITCH FROM VINYL TO COMPACT DISCS, MAN. THERE'S GONNA BE A BACKLASH HERE. I CAN SMELL IT.
AH THE ONLY THING YOU CAN SMELL IS YESTERDAY'S CALZONE, BUDDY YOU EVER THINK TO EMPTY THE TRASH BEFORE YOU LOCK UP AT NIGHT?

BEAUTIFUL.
YOU GONNA HAVE TO CALL THE COPS AGAIN, MARIO. WE GOT ANOTHER PSYCHO SLEEPIN IN THE TRASH.
WHAT'S HE SAYING? HE TRYING TO TALK UNDER THAT MASK?
AH, WHO CARES? I THINK HE'S MUMBLING SOMETHING. BUT HE'S TOTALLY OUT OF IT, MAN. YOU'D BETTER NOT TOUCH HIM IN CASE HE'S SOME KINDA JUNKIE.
GET BACK IN THE STORE. CLOSE THE DOORS..
WHAT?
I THINK HE'S TRYING TO WARN YOU ABOUT SOMETHING.

GO!

FOR A FRACTION OF A SECOND I WONDER WHAT NORMAL PEOPLE DO ON SUNDAY MORNINGS.
BIG, DEEP BREATH, PARKER...
ARE THEY BLINKING AT THEIR RADIO-ALARMS? ARE THEY NUZZLING INTO THEIR WIVES? ARE THEY HAVING THEIR RIBS BROKEN BY SOME OLD FRIEND OF THE FAMILY DRESSED-UP IN A RUBBER COSTUME?
OR IS THAT JUST ME?

FOUR HOURS AGO, THIS LUNATIC FRIEND OF THE FAMILY WAS HOLDING 18 PEOPLE HOSTAGE IN A CHURCH AND PROMISING TO GAS THEM UNLESS HIS DEMANDS WERE MET.
BUT HE DIDN'T WANT MONEY. CASH WOULD BE TOO OBVIOUS FOR A CROWD-PLEASER LIKE THE GREEN GOBLIN.
GAH!
LIKEWISE DRUGS, HELICOPTERS AND SOUTH AMERICAN PASSPORTS...
WHAT HE WANTED WAS ME ON LIVE TELEVISION, STICKING A STEAK-KNIFE IN MY STOMACH AND FORFEITING MY GUTS FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE GREAT AMERICAN PUBLIC.
NATURALLY I DIDN'T COMPLY AND WELL...

WE'VE BEEN BREAKING EACH OTHER'S BONES EVER SINCE
WHO'S THE DADDY NOW, MISTER OSBORN?
HRAGGH!
WHO'S THE DADDY NOW, HUH?
SWEET JEEZ!
SOMETHING HEAVY SOMETHING HEAVY SOMETHING HEAVY
THE MAILBOX, SPIDER-MAN! HIT HIM WITH THE MAILBOX!

NGAH!
OOH.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN "OOH"? IF I HADN'T HIT HIM WITH SOMETHING BIG AND HEAVY HE'D HAVE KILLED EVERYBODY!
HEY, TAKE IT EASY! I M NOT JUDGING YOU OR ANYTHING, MAN ALL I'M SAYING IS YOU COULD'A KNOCKED HIM OUT WITHOUT BRAIN-DAMAGING THE GUY
YOU! GET AWAY FROM THE PUMPKINS! THOSE ARE HIS HOME-MADE BOMBS!
WHAT?
OH MY GOD!

MAN, WHAT S WRONG WITH YOU? I TOLD YOU NOT TO TOUCH THAT..
YOU GOTTA FLY ME TO A HOSPITAL, SPIDER-MAN I GOT..I GOT. I GOT ALL THE LITTLE BITS STUCK IN MY LEG AND THEY FEEL LIKE FRIGGIN RAZOR-BLADES, MAN
BUT I CAN'T FLY. GOD, I CAN HARDLY EVEN WALK AFTER THE KICKING THAT IDIOT GAVE ME. MAYBE SOMEBODY COULD USE THEIR CELL-PHONE AND CALL AN AMBULANCE OR SOMETHING?
FORGET THE AMBULANCE. I'M CALLING THE COPS ON YOU AND YOUR STUPID FRIEND, SPIDER-MAN...
WHAT?
HEY! S'OKAY! CANCEL THE CALL, MAN! HERE THEY COME RIGHT ON TIME FOR A CHANGE!
NOT SUCH A SMART-GUY NOW, SPIDER-MAN. NOT SUCH A SMART-GUY WHEN THEY THROW YOU IN JAIL, HUH?
SWEAR TO GOD THAT LUNATIC'S BRAIN-DAMAGED THIS POOR GUY.
HEY! WHERE D HE GO?

Continued in Spider-Man #1 on sale April 14th!

WAR PARTY

WIZARD hacks into Nick Fury's high-security mainframe to break down the combatants in Marvel's looming 'Secret War'

Nick Fury

By Brian Michael Bendis

On Feb. 4, war gets declared in the Marvel Universe. Engineered by field general Brian Michael Bendis (*Ultimate Spider-Man*) and executed by up-and-coming painter Gabriele Dell'Otto, *Secret War* is a five-issue mini-series, shipping quarterly, that draws many of the Marvel icons into a classified conflict and finds them tackling an undercover mission that comes back to haunt many of the combatants years later.

Organized by S.H.I.E.L.D. Director Nick Fury, this "Secret War" brings together Luke Cage, Captain America, Spider-Man, Daredevil, the Black Widow and Wolverine as the main insurgent force, which must infiltrate Dr. Doom's nation of Latveria to uncover why and how a bevy of tech-savvy supervillains, such as Killer Shrike and Jack O'Lantern, have come across a cache of deadly weapons and technology, upsetting the balance of power in the Marvel U.

However, Fury's "A-Team" of heroes don't go into Latveria with guns—or powers—blazing; this is an undercover mission, perfectly suited for these select heroes, who often operate outside official jurisdiction and are just as comfortable in their street clothes as they are in their colorful costumes.

Secret War picks up a few years after this undercover mission has been conducted, as a mysterious enemy with ties to the covert operations begins targeting the heroes for revenge. Who is the menace, and how is it tied to the Secret War? *Wizard* downloaded the top-secret S.H.I.E.L.D. profiles of the main players involved, searching for information on who could have exposed Marvel's "secret warriors."

SHIELD.NET

Name: nickfury

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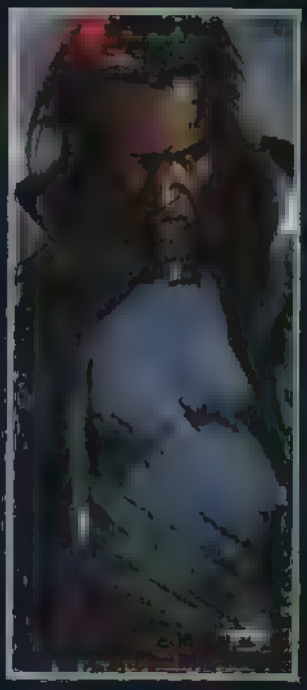
S.H.I.E.L.D. FILE NUMBER 3445-765WO

WOLVERINE

REAL NAME: Unknown
IDENTITY: Secret
LEGAL STATUS: Citizen of Canada, now permanent resident in the U.S., no criminal record
OCCUPATION: Adventurer, former samurai, former C.I.A. operative, former member of Canada's Weapon X program, captain in the Canadian armed forces, assigned to intelligence (retired)
OTHER ALIASES: Logan, Weapon X, Patch
PLACE OF BIRTH: Canada (presumed)
MARITAL STATUS: Single
KNOWN RELATIVES: None
GROUP AFFILIATIONS: X-Men, Clan Yashida (former), the Weapon X Program (former), Alpha Flight
BASE OF OPERATIONS: Xavier Institute, Westchester, New York; mobile
HEIGHT: 5 ft. 3 in.
WEIGHT: With Adamantium skeleton, 300 lbs.
EYES: Blue
HAIR: Black
ENEMIES: Sabretooth, Magneto, Lady Deathstrike, Juggernaut, Hulk, Silver Samurai, Cyber (deceased), Ogun, The Hand, Omega Red, The Reavers
POWERS: Power level 8. Mutant. Regenerates damaged or destroyed areas of his body & internal organs. Immune to poisons & alcohol. Superhuman acute senses.
WEAPONS: Adamantium bonded to his entire skeleton. Three one-foot long Adamantium claws on each hand which he can "sheathe." Adamantium skeleton result of a top-secret Canadian project named Weapon X. Everything concerning Logan's origin is a mystery.

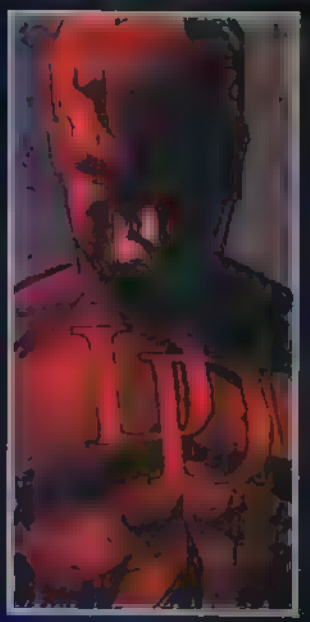


Notes:
Logan is my secret weapon. He owes me his life five times over. His entire persona makes for the perfect ruthless stealth agent. In a perfect world, he would be a Level 10 S.H.I.E.L.D. Agent.

S.H.I.E.L.D. FILE NUMBER 535345-566DD

DAREDEVIL

REAL NAME: Matthew Michael Murdock
OCCUPATION: Lawyer
IDENTITY: Public
LEGAL STATUS: Citizen of the United States, no criminal record
FORMER ALIASES: Michael Murdock
PLACE OF BIRTH: New York City
MARITAL STATUS: Single
KNOWN RELATIVES: Jonathan "Jack" Murdock - father (deceased), Grace Murdock - mother
GROUP AFFILIATIONS: Natasha Romanov a.k.a. Black Widow (See S.H.I.E.L.D. FILE #5665656-67BW)
BASE OF OPERATIONS: New York City, Hell's Kitchen
HEIGHT: 6 ft.
WEIGHT: 200 lbs.
EYES: Blue
HAIR: Red
ENEMIES: Kingpin, Owl, Purple Man, Mister Fear, Stilt Man, Gladiator, Bullseye, Typhoid Mary
POWERS: Power level 7. Superhuman sense. All senses register at a high level to compensate for blindness. Acute radar sense. Olympic athlete and gymnast. Ninja martial arts training.
WEAPONS: Customized billy-club.



Notes:
Murdock straddles the line between enforcing the law and upholding justice. Perfect for certain types of covert ops. Black Widow has him wrapped around her finger; important to note for future.

S.H.I.E.L.D. FILE NUMBER 69678-616SPI

SPIDER-MAN

NAME: Peter Parker
OCCUPATION: Freelance photographer, teacher
IDENTITY: Secret
LEGAL STATUS: Citizen of the United States with no criminal record
FORMER ALIASES: None
PLACE OF BIRTH: New York City
MARITAL STATUS: Married
RELATIVES: Mary Jane Watson Parker—wife, Richard Parker—father (deceased), Mary Parker—mother (deceased), Ben Parker—uncle (deceased), May Parker—aunt
GROUP AFFILIATION: None
BASE OF OPERATIONS: New York City
HEIGHT: 5 ft. 10 in.
WEIGHT: 165 lbs.
EYES: Hazel
HAIR: Brown
ENEMIES: Green Goblin, Venom, Electro, Doctor Octopus, Vulture, Kraven, Sandman, Mysterio, Kingpin
POWERS: Power level 8. Strength, speed and agility. Ability to stick to walls. Spider-sense, a built-in radar that warns him of immediate personal danger.
WEAPONS: Homemade web-shooters: twin wrist spinneret mechanisms that shoot thin strands of a special "web fluid." The web fluid is a shear-thinning liquid that turns solid on contact.

NOTES

Parker feels off a staggering guilt that propels him to basically do anything you tell him he has to do. The public perception of him is a big negative. Keep your distance unless absolutely necessary.

S.H.I.E.L.D. FILE NUMBER 4545567-34LkCg

LUKE CAGE

REAL NAME: Luke Cage
OCCUPATION: Hero for hire
IDENTITY: Public
LEGAL STATUS: Citizen of the United States acquitted of criminal charges
OTHER ALIASES: Hero for Hire, Power Man, Carl Lucas
PLACE OF BIRTH: New York City
MARITAL STATUS: Single
RELATIVES: Leonard Lucas—father (deceased), Esther Lucas—mother (deceased)
GROUP AFFILIATION: Heroes for Hire Inc.
BASE OF OPERATIONS: Harlem
HEIGHT: 6 ft. 6 in.
WEIGHT: 425 lbs.
EYES: Brown
HAIR: Black
ENEMIES: Stiletto, Discus, Cockroach, Mace, Chemistro
POWERS: Power level 8. Superhuman strength, dense muscle and bone tissue. Steel-hard skin.

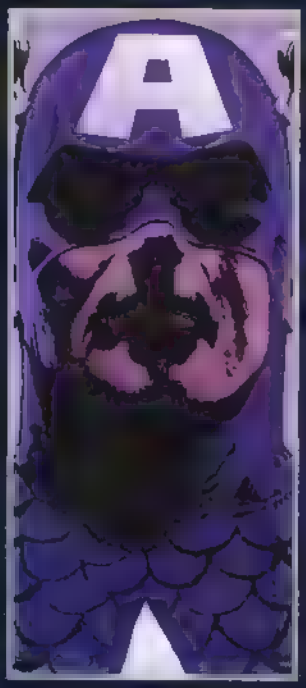
NOTES

Cage will take money from anyone on the planet except me for services rendered, but he has an intense sense of patriotism and duty that can easily be manipulated. But only for the right kind of mission. He has a tendency to do interviews.

S.H.I.E.L.D. FILE NUMBER 00008643-34cap

CAPTAIN AMERICA

REAL NAME: Steven Rogers
IDENTITY: Public
OCCUPATION: Crimefighter, former freelance artist
LEGAL STATUS: Citizen of the United States with no criminal record
OTHER ALIASES: Nomad, the Captain
PLACE OF BIRTH: New York City
MARITAL STATUS: Single
RELATIVES: Joseph Rogers—father (deceased), Sarah Rogers—mother (deceased)
GROUP AFFILIATION: Avengers, Invaders (former), partner to Bucky (deceased), Nomad, the Falcon
BASE OF OPERATIONS: New York City
HEIGHT: 6 ft. 2 in.
WEIGHT: 240 lbs.
EYES: Blue
HAIR: Blond
ENEMIES: Red Skull, Batroc, Baron Zemo (I & II), Modok, Hydra
POWERS: Power level 8: Peak human agility, strength, speed, endurance. Master of the martial arts, boxing, judo.
WEAPONS: Virtually indestructible Adamantium-Vibranium alloy shield



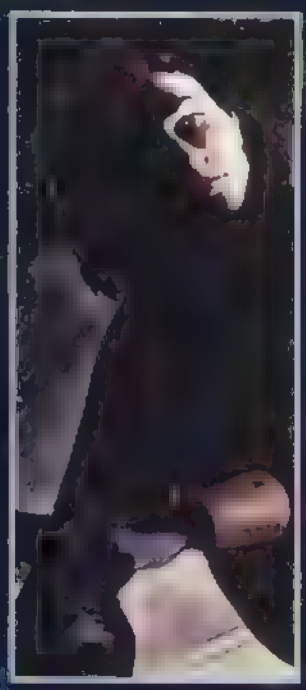
Notes

Cap is the most and least efficient agent. His public persona has become a large problem for stealth work, but for certain types of missions, it's the perfect decoy. His patriotism is skewed and out of date. He rarely deals with his anger issues.

S.H.I.E.L.D. FILE NUMBER 5665656-67BW

BLACK WIDOW

REAL NAME: Natasha Romanov
OCCUPATION: Adventurer, intelligence agent, former ballerina
IDENTITY: Publicly known
LEGAL STATUS: Former citizen of the U.S.S.R. (defected); granted a visa to the U.S. by S.H.I.E.L.D.; given amnesty for criminal espionage
FORMER ALIASES: None
PLACE OF BIRTH: Stalingrad, Russia (former Soviet Union)
MARITAL STATUS: Widowed
RELATIVES: Alexi Shostakov (alias Red Guardian I)—husband (deceased)
GROUP AFFILIATIONS: Avengers, S.H.I.E.L.D., partner of Matthew Murdock, a.k.a. Daredevil (see S.H.I.E.L.D. FILE #535354-566DD), former member of Champions
BASE OF OPERATIONS: Mobile, but maintains a home in New York City
HEIGHT: 5 ft. 7 in.
WEIGHT: 125 lbs.
EYES: Blue
HAIR: Red-auburn
POWERS: Power level 6. No superhuman abilities, but possesses Olympic-level agility and athletic ability. An expert in many forms of unarmed combat.
WEAPONS: Her wrist weapons include a "widow's line" and explosive "widow's bite."

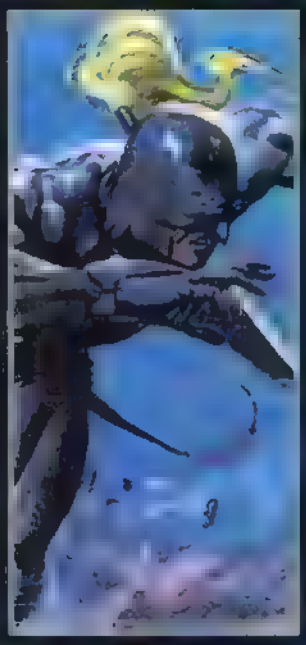


Notes

Natasha's never let me down yet; she's perfect for this mission, and as a field agent, knows she can't let anything stand in her way—including loyalty. The most effective, ruthless agent I've got.

S.H.I.E.L.D. FILE NUMBER 3VVV1-345465KIL

KILLER SHRIKE



REAL NAME: Simon Maddicks
OCCUPATION: Professional criminal
IDENTITY: Secret
LEGAL STATUS: Citizen of the United States with no criminal record
FORMER ALIASES: Harold Simmons
PLACE OF BIRTH: Williamsburg, Virginia
MARITAL STATUS: Single
KNOWN RELATIVES: None
GROUP AFFILIATION: Former ally of Modular Man, former agent of Roxxon Oil Company, former agent of Brand Corporation
HEIGHT: 6 ft. 5 in.
WEIGHT: 250 lbs.
EYES: Brown
HAIR: Brown
ENEMIES: Ulysses Bloodstone, Spider-Man
POWERS: Peak human reflexes, agility, endurance and resistance to injury. Ability to fly due to anti-gravity generator located at base of his spine. Can attain speeds of up to 80 mph.
WEAPONS: Head-to-toe body suit—insulated steel alloy mesh. Flight turbulence protection. Small caliber firearms. Twin wrist power-blasters. Each bracelet has two curved titanium talons that discharge a high-frequency lightning-like bolt of electricity with a maximum charge of 35,000 volts. Maximum range 35 feet.

NOTES

You don't sport the word "Killer" in your *nom de guerre* without earning it; his low profile belies his high body count. Agents should treat him as a potential threat at all times.

S.H.I.E.L.D. FILE NUMBER 3VVV1-4457JACK

JACK-O-LANTERN

REAL NAME: Jason Philip Macendale Jr.
OCCUPATION: Freelance terrorist/assassin
IDENTITY: Secret; became second Hobgoblin until his alleged death at the hands of the original Hobgoblin.
FORMER ALIASES: None
PLACE OF BIRTH: Boston, Massachusetts
MARITAL STATUS: Divorced
KNOWN RELATIVES: None
GROUP AFFILIATIONS: Norman Osborn, Maggia
BASE OF OPERATIONS: Mobile
HEIGHT: 6 ft. 1 in.
WEIGHT: 210 lbs.
EYES: Brown
HAIR: Black
ENEMIES: Spider-Man, Silver Sable
POWERS: Military training, hand-to-hand combat and martial arts.
WEAPONS: Anaesthetic, lachrymal, regurgitant gas, smoke and concussion grenades. Bulletproof helmet with telescopic infrared image intensifiers. Body armor made of metal-covered, multi-segment Kevlar panels. High-frequency electric transducer wrist blasters.

NOTES

This guy's as close to human scum as you can possibly get, having killed women and children. A freelance terrorist, he will kill for any cause, for the right money; Parker should've aced this guy already.

CAINE AND ABLE

With 'Batman' still shrouded in secrecy, Oscar-winning actor Michael Caine signs on to play Alfred Pennyworth

How did the latest details regarding the upcoming "Batman" film emerge? The butler did it. After the announcement from Warner Bros. in October that "Memento" director Christopher Nolan's new "Batman" film would star Christian Bale ("American Psycho") in the role of the Caped Crusader, actor Michael Caine ("The Statement") revealed that he has signed on as the hero's trusted butler, Alfred Pennyworth, in the second major role cast.

After Caine spilled the beans on his casting, Warner Bros. became increasingly tight-lipped about the rest of the cast, the film's script and the overall themes and tone. But that hasn't stopped some secrets from slipping through the cracks. Caine revealed he'd signed a deal for three consecutive "Batman" films, had been told the film (penned by "Blade: Trinity" writer/director David Goyer) has been given a $135 million budget and will be filmed in London (although there's no word as to whether or not any Gotham City sets will be constructed).

"I had a long conversation with Christopher Nolan before I accepted the part," Caine revealed in published reports. "The short answer was that he wants ['Batman'] to be more natural. I find a lot of these comic book heroes boring because they are invincible. If you're bullet-proof, where's the jeopardy for the hero? You can't gas him, you can't kill him; what's the point? And [Nolan] is making a very, very natural Batman. I remember one phrase he said to me; I said, 'Well, he's very powerful and strong.' And [Nolan] said, 'Yes he is Michael, but not because of Kryptonite—it's because he does push-ups.'"

Cillian Murphy ("28 Days Later"), another cast addition, has signed on to reportedly play one of Batman's villains. Although no one's saying exactly what villain Murphy will play (although most indications point to the Scarecrow, long rumored to be the next onscreen Bat-villain), it's been reported that the Irish actor won the part after auditioning for the part of Batman.

While no one outside of Bale, Murphy and Caine have been signed for the "Batman" cast at press time, there have been numerous rumors that Warner Bros. is itching to cast a number of the film's other major roles in the coming weeks.

Reportedly, Katie Homes ("Dawson's Creek") is in final negotiations to play a character named Rachel, who will be Bruce Wayne's love interest. Other rumors persist that Warner Bros. and Nolan are pursuing Viggo Mortensen ("Lord of the Rings") to play the film's primary villain, believed in many circles to be Ra's Al Ghul. There are also rumors that Oscar-winning director Clint Eastwood could make a cameo in the film as the mayor of Gotham City.

One of the most controversial casting decisions will no doubt revolve around Jim Gordon, Batman's closest confidante and link to the Gotham City Police Department. There have been rumors that suggested Dennis Quaid ("The Rookie") was up for the part, but the latest actor to emerge as reportedly being in the

CAST CRUSADER
Only Christian Bale (far right), Michael Caine and Cillian Murphy have been confirmed to appear in 'Batman' as of press time.

CAINE: HOLMES: MURPHY: ©WBEI DC/JIM/WIREIMAGE.COM; MORTENSEN: EVERETT COLLECTION

running is character actor Chris Cooper ("Seabiscuit").

While potential candidates for Batman's supporting cast are being bandied about, there are still very few details available about the script. Even Goyer, who penned the script, said he couldn't comment on any details surrounding the story. However, the always-chatty Caine did admit the story begins with Bruce Wayne as an infant.

"We start when Batman is a baby, so I'm more like a father."

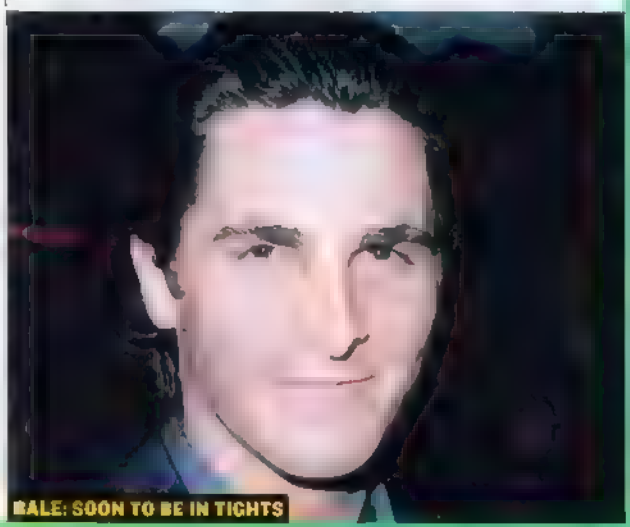
MICHAEL CAINE, ON PLAYING BRUCE WAYNE'S BUTLER

"We start when Batman is a baby, so I'm more like a father," Caine said in an interview. "I'm a father who knows how to lay a table with the knives and forks in the right places." Caine even pointed out that when Nolan sent him the script, it came along with a driver who watched the star read it, made sure no copies were made and then returned the script to the Warner Bros. Bat-Cave.

While little may be known about the storyline, rumors remain abundant. Reportedly titled "Batman: Intimidation" (previous rumored titles include "Intimidation Game" and "The Frightening"), the film is rumored to be focus on a young Bruce Wayne early in his career as the Dark Knight as he faces the immortal, eco-terrorist Ra's Al Ghul and the fear-inducing, psychologist-turned-villain, the Scarecrow.

Aiming for a start date in early 2004 in the U.K. and a possible 2005 release date, more official information about the film should start leaking in the coming months as Nolan/Warner Bros. remain cautious about revealing too much too fast.

"The 'Batman' movie is ultra, ultra secret," says DC Comics Senior Vice President of Creative Affairs (and Hollywood liaison) Greg Noveck. "Batman's on double secret probation, and I know nothing. And if I did know something, I would claim to know nothing." ■ **MIKE COTTON**



BALE: SOON TO BE IN TIGHTS

TRAILERS

SAMARITAN

ASTRO CITY Producer Ben Barenholtz ("Requiem for a Dream"), screenwriter Jonathan Alpers and creator Kurt Busiek have teamed up to produce a live-action Astro City film. For an interview with Alpers, check out www.wizarduniverse.com.

BATMAN ANIMATED Look for the all-new Batman cartoon to debut on Kids WB during the Fall 2004 season.

CATWOMAN Rumor has it that Laurel Hedare (played by Sharon Stone) will mention Bruce Wayne!

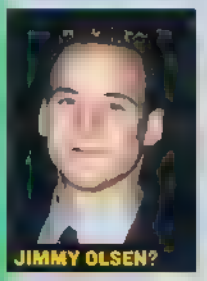
FANTASTIC FOUR Fox has reportedly lined up July 4, 2005 for a release date. "'Fantastic Four' on the 4th is too good of a marketing angle to pass up," says Marvel Studios Vice President Kevin Feige.

IRON MAN According to Feige, writers Alfred Gough and Miles Millar have played up the alcoholic playboy angle in their first draft of the script. "We're not doing an after school special," says Feige, "but it's certainly part of his personality."

LUKE CAGE Expect word from Marvel Studios and Sony on a director and a star soon. "There'll be a little more of what I'll call the 'fun' from the early *Power Man* stuff," says Feige. "Not the camp, but the fun stuff."

SHAZAM! The writing team of Joel Cohen and Alec Sokolow ("Cheaper by the Dozen") are aboard to pen a new draft of the Captain Marvel script

SILVER SURFER "Now that 'FF' is up and running," says Feige, "'Silver Surfer' will be the next new franchise to be launched between Marvel and Fox."



JIMMY OLSEN?

STEVE NILES Dimension Films has acquired the rights to Niles' *Hyde*, a comic proposal that re-imagines Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Niles and rocker Rob Zombie ("House of 1,000 Corpses") have united to create the horror-themed Creep Entertainment International.

SUPERMAN Ben Savage ("Boy Meets World") is rumored to be up for the role of Jimmy Olsen; the film still lacks a star and a director.

X-MEN 3 Director Bryan Singer has signed a development deal with 20th Century Fox; rumor has it he's already begun negotiations to direct "X3." ■ **THE WIZARD STAFF**

TEAM SPIRIT OF THE MONTH

JUSTICE LEAGUE

After appearances this season from Dr. Fate, Amazo, Despero, the Royal Flush Gang and a slew of Green Lanterns, what do the producers of Cartoon Network's "Justice League" do for an encore? Well, rumor has it that Season 3 (which could kick off in Fall 2004) will feature appearances from Captain Atom, Red Tornado, the Atom, Black Canary and Green Arrow! Look for the series to possibly change its name to "Justice League Unlimited" as well.

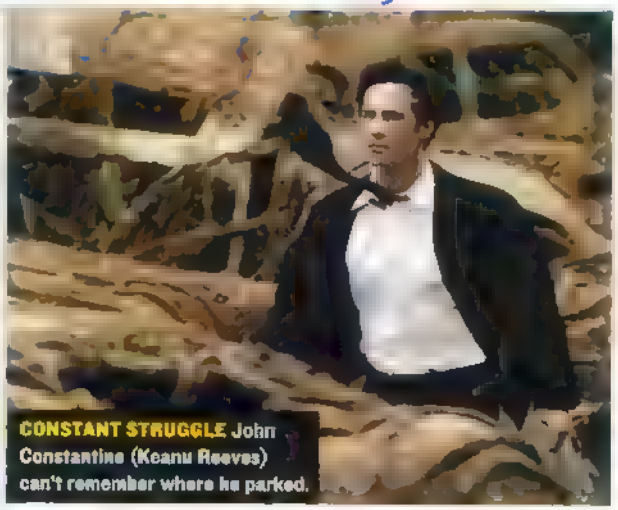
HELL ON FILM

'Constantine' director casts an evil light on the noir thriller's L.A. set and sinister storyline

Think downtown Los Angeles looks like a nightmare at rush hour? You should see it in Hell "Constantine," starring Keanu Reeves as the trenchant, embittered occultist John Constantine from DC Comics' *Hellblazer* series, follows the story of John as he teams up with policewoman Angela Dodson to help investigate the mysterious death of her sister Isabel, which leads him into a hellish version of his hometown.

"John goes into Hell to find Angela's sister to see if she has committed suicide," describes "Constantine" director Francis Lawrence of the elaborate set hewn from wrecked cars and barrels of brown muck. "What we've done is actually made Hell have geography so that you have the idea that wherever you are, there is a Hell version of it and a Heaven version of it. John goes to Hell and it's literally the 101 Freeway heading toward downtown L.A."

Deep in "Hell L.A." (and even on the sunny streets of the city itself), Constantine comes up against legions of half-breed demons who inject evil into mankind's world. When he's not kicking their asses with an array of holy relics, Constantine kicks back in his apartment (located over a bowling alley), safely insulated from Hell's spawn with a few dozen five gallon drums of holy water.



CONSTANT STRUGGLE John Constantine (Keanu Reeves) can't remember where he parked.

Check out this image from the film that gives new meaning to the term "dead stop traffic"! ■ **TODD CASEY**

SHOTS IN THE DARK

All-new photos from the set of New Line and Marvel Studios' 'Blade: Trinity'

"Blade: Trinity" will undoubtedly be a cut above its predecessors. Taking on a powerful contingent of bloodsuckers that have invaded the surface world, vampire hunter Blade (Wesley Snipes) makes his final stand alongside Jessica Biel ("Texas Chainsaw Massacre") in the role of Abigail Whistler, the daughter of Blade's most trusted confidante, Kris Kristofferson's Whistler. Check out Blade in this commanding pose (1) as he ponders whether to decapitate or just stake the next vamp that crosses his path, archer Abigail Whistler puts Ollie Queen to shame with her compound bow (2) and appears distressed (3), although we find that hard to believe given the amount of weaponry she's packin'. ■ **MC**

1

2

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NO AVERAGE JOE

'G.I. Joe' Season One, Part One invades stores

Who knew the "Real American Heroes" were so comical? With the Feb. 3 release of the "G.I. Joe" Season One Part One DVD box set from Rhino Home Video (which includes half the episodes from the inaugural 1984 season), Joe fans can revisit several of the early episodes that were written by comic book scribes. Longtime comic writer Steve Gerber (*Howard the Duck*) was the story editor for the first season and even scripted three episodes ("Cobra Stops the World" and "There's No Place Like Springfield," pts. 1 and 2).

"'G.I. Joe' was my best experience in animation," says Gerber, who also worked on the "Dungeons and Dragons" cartoon and co-created Thundarr the Barbarian. "We really wanted to get away from the saccharine Saturday morning cartoons of the day. 'G.I. Joe' was really the stepping stone between the dumb kid stuff and some of the sophisticated animation we have today."

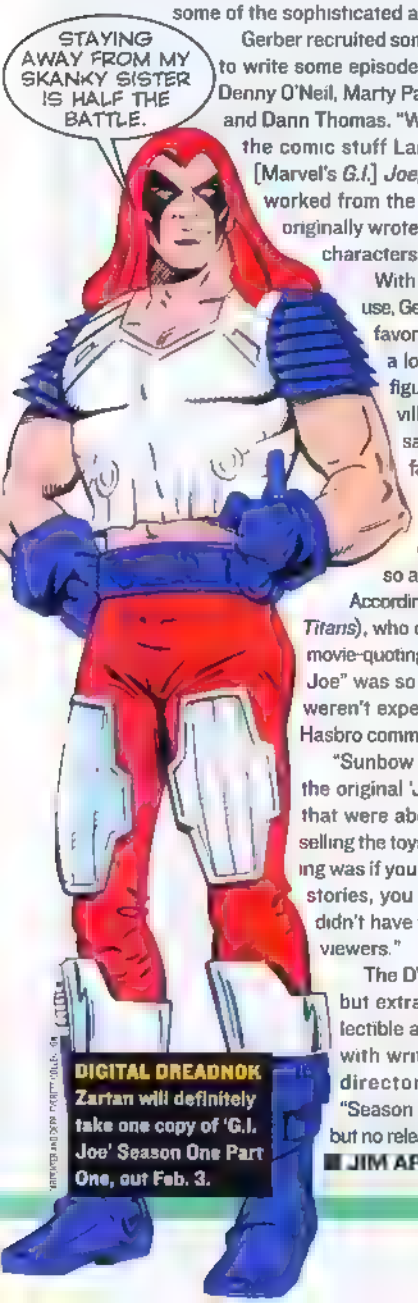
Gerber recruited some of his comic book buddies to write some episodes, including Marv Wolfman, Denny O'Neil, Marty Pasko, Gerry Conway and Roy and Dann Thomas. "We kept things separate from the comic stuff Larry Hama was writing with [Marvel's *G.I.*] *Joe*," says Gerber. "We basically worked from the [character] bios that Larry originally wrote up and tried to flesh out the characters as we went along."

With such a berth of characters to use, Gerber remembers two particular favorites. "Cobra Commander was a lot more fun to write after we figured out he was less a master villain than a complete lunatic," says Gerber. "Shipwreck was a favorite; I always loved that talking parrot, Polly. It didn't just speak, it engaged in actual conversations! And they were so acerbic, it was just hilarious."

According to Marv Wolfman (*New Teen Titans*), who created the personality of the movie-quoting Quick Kick for the series, "G.I. Joe" was so successful because writers weren't expected to crank out half-hour Hasbro commercials.

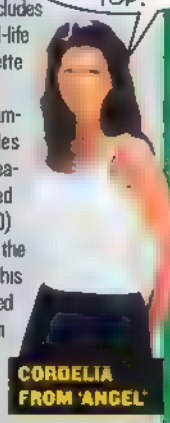
"Sunbow Productions [who produced the original 'Joe' series] let us do stories that were about the characters, not just selling the toys," says Wolfman. "Their feeling was if you liked the characters and the stories, you would buy the toys, so you didn't have to force-feed the toys to the viewers."

The DVD set may not include toys, but extras include an exclusive collectible animation cel plus interviews with writer Christy Marx and voice director Wally Burr. Rhino has a "Season One Part Two" in the works, but no release date has been announced. ■ JIM AREHART



DIGITAL DREADNOK Zartan will definitely take one copy of 'G.I. Joe' Season One Part One, out Feb. 3.

DVD BUZZ



CORDELIA FROM 'ANGEL'

AMERICAN SPLENDOR The film, based on the autobiographical comics of Harvey Pekar, has popped up on nearly every critic's top 10! The disc includes commentary from the film's cast as well as their real-life counterparts and a "Road to Splendor" featurette following Pekar on his festival circuits. (Feb. 3)

ANGEL SEASON 3 The soul-plagued vampire continues his crusade against Los Angeles demons. Extras to the six-disc set include the featurette "Darla: Deliver Us From Evil" and deleted scenes with commentary by Joss Whedon. (Feb. 10)

ED WOOD See 2003's "Sexiest Man Alive" play the worst director that ever lived! Tim Burton helms this comedy/homage to the misunderstood genius (played by Johnny Depp) that brought us "Plan 9 From Outer Space." Special features include behind the scenes footage hosted by Depp and Bill Murray in a meat locker with a Mariachi band. (Feb. 10)

HOUSE OF THE DEAD College students go to a deserted island on Spring Break and find themselves on the opposite ends of salivating zombie stares. The disc for this undoubted masterpiece (based on the video game) has some creatively titled extras like "Anatomy of a Zombie" and "Cooking Up Blood." (Jan. 27)

ONCE UPON A TIME IN MEXICO Robert Rodriguez puts the spy kids to bed to direct this final installment of the "El Mariachi" trilogy. This disc arrives packed with a DVD-ROM shooting gallery, deleted scenes, a tour of Rodriguez's production studio. (Jan. 27)

"ONCE UPON A TIME"

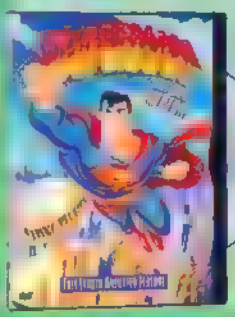
RETURNER An expert assassin? Check. A hot savior girl from the future? Check. An alien capable of world annihilation? You better believe that's a check! Take a John Woo-injected shoot-'em-up from Japan and throw in time-traveling and extraterrestrials, and you've pretty much made a classic. (Feb. 10)

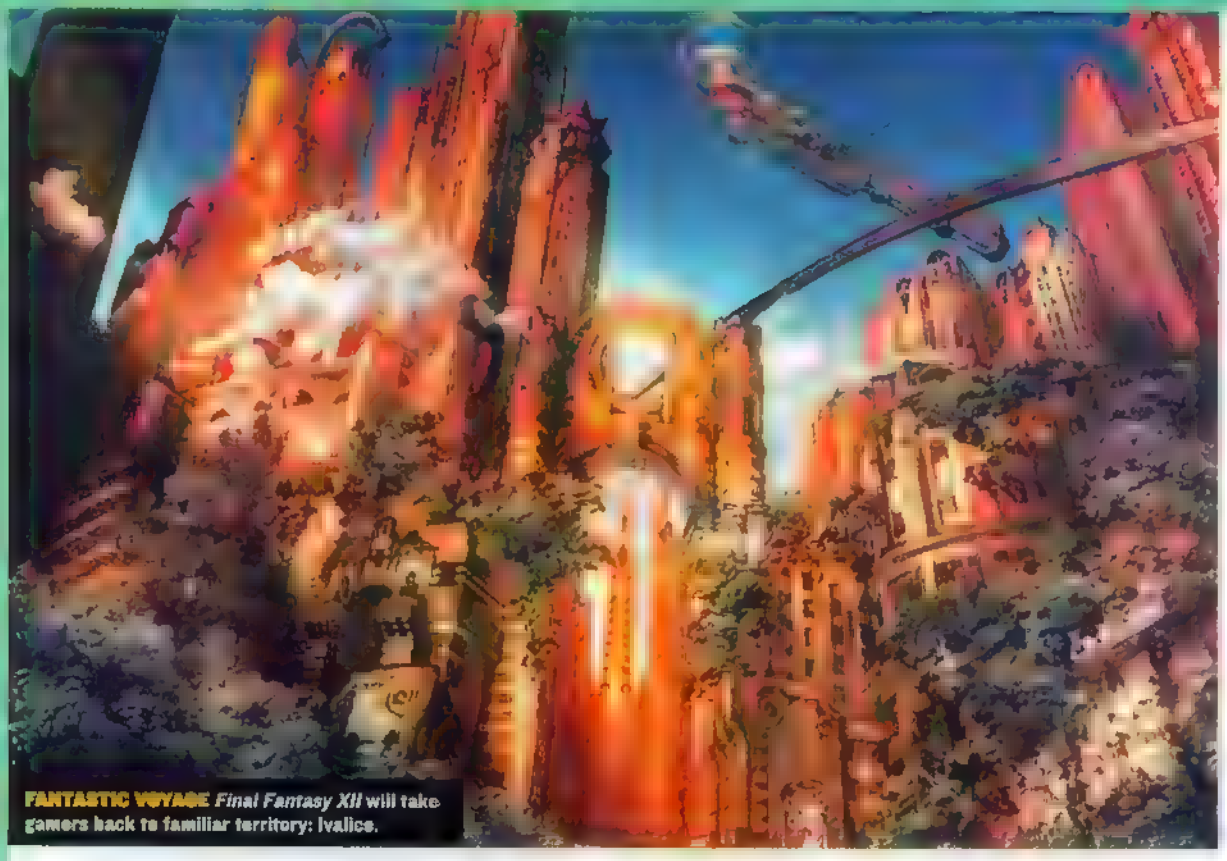
STAR TREK: COLLECTOR'S EDITION In the last feature before the Next Generation crew was introduced to the big screen, Kirk and his space-faring peeps journey to "The Undiscovered Country." The two discs include a "making of" feature and info on the Star Trek universe. (Jan. 27) ■ WALTER ORSINI

ANIMATED ICON OF THE MONTH

SUPERMAN: THE LAST SON OF KRYPTON

That big, red "S" on his chest is more recognizable than most country's flags. Without a doubt, Superman remains an icon. With the original animated movie that launched his WB cartoon series now on DVD, "Last Son" chronicles Superman's journey from last surviving infant of a doomed race to celebrated champion of justice. The DVD includes character bios, an "Escape from Planet Krypton" challenge game (kinda morbid, eh?) and a lesson on how to draw the Boy Scout yourself. (Feb. 3)





FANTASTIC VOYAGE *Final Fantasy XII* will take gamers back to familiar territory: Ivalice.

A TACTICAL ADVANTAGE

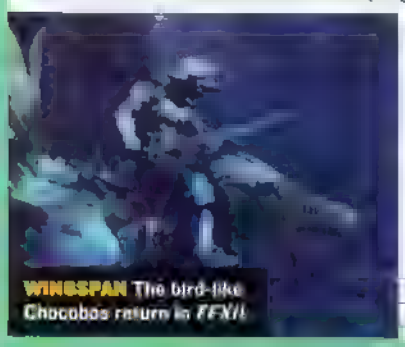
'FF: Tactics' team returns with 'Final Fantasy XII'

There's been a lot of deja vu in Square Enix's Final Fantasy series recently. *FFX-2* returned to *FFX*'s Spira; the "Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children" movie continues the Playstation classic, and now *FFXII* returns to Ivalice.

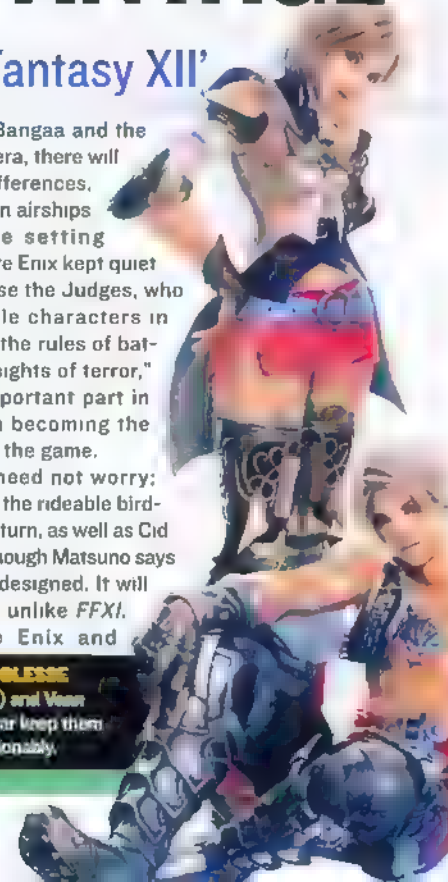
If you've never heard of Ivalice, then you haven't played the cult strategy hit *Final Fantasy Tactics*. But you'll hear about it soon as the setting for *Final Fantasy XII*, not coincidentally helmed by Yasumi Matsuno, director for *Final Fantasy Tactics* and the GameBoy Advance bestseller *Final Fantasy: Tactics Advance*. In fact, for FF's latest outing, Matsuno took most of his *Tactics* programming team, and is promising a game that will be a worthy successor to both series.

"It's actually a new version of Ivalice," said Matsuno. While there will be many similarities, like the inclusion of several races from *FFT* like the lizard-like Bangaa and the bunny-eared Viera, there will be important differences, with the focus on airships as part of the setting (although Square Enix kept quiet on how); likewise the Judges, who as non playable characters in *Tactics* upheld the rules of battle, are now "knights of terror," and play an important part in the story, even becoming the official logo for the game.

FF purists need not worry: series icons like the rideable bird-like Chocobos return, as well as Cid and the Mog, although Matsuno says they've been redesigned. It will also be offline, unlike *FFXI*. While Square Enix and



WINGSPAN The bird-like Chocobos return in *FFXII*.



DRESSED FOR NOBLESSE Princess Ashe (top) and Vaan won't let a global war keep them from dressing fashionably.

WAR JOURNAL *FFXII* will drop gamers into a world war between the empires of Ivalice, Arcadia and Rosana.

Matsuno are keeping mum on the battle system for now, an early trailer points to the same three-person combat party However, in another first, the world map will be fully three-dimensional, with a camera that can turn 360 degrees to get a full view of the action.

And there'll be plenty of action, as *FFXII* drops players right into a world war between the main empires of Ivalice, the Arcadian Empire and the Rosaria Empires. During this conflict, the Arcadia Empire has taken over the small but strategically significant Dalmasca Kingdom, deposing its king. As Vaan, a young man who dreams of escaping Dalmasca to be an airship pirate, the player will meet Ashe, the ex-princess of Dalmasca who now leads freedom fighters against the Empire

FINAL FANTASY XII

Other characters include the noticeably hot Viera solider Fran and her companion Valfrea, a gun-toting human who has his own personal sky scooter.

"About eight years ago, I came up with the concept [for Ivalice]," says Matsuno. "It's a big world that encompasses FFXII as well. We need some more time, but we won't betray your expectations."

He'll have time yet; *FFXII* is due in Summer of 2004 in Japan, with an American release tentatively scheduled for early 2005.

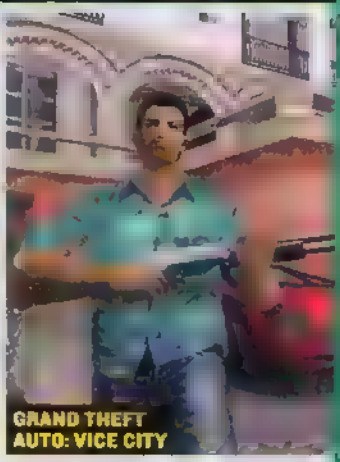
■ ROBERT BRICKEN

DIDJA KNOW...?

The only *Final Fantasy* game to not make it out to America was *FFIII*.

VIDEO GAME RUMBLINGS

GRAND THEFT AUTO Rock Star Games puts Vice City in the rearview mirror and heads for a new destination in 2004! The insanely popular *Grand Theft Auto* series officially returns this year with a new installment exclusively for the PS2, giving violence-craving gamers more chances to punch pedestrians, shoot hooligans, hijack dope rides and burn rubber around town. Just remember to carry the Club.



GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY

RISE TO HONOR Action star Jet Li typically saves his high-flying beatings for the silver screen. But in February, the martial arts master will flip and kick his way through the virtual world of *Rise to Honor*, a brand new third-person actioner from Sony Playstation. Not only did Li provide his voice and likeness to the game's main character Kit Yun—the loyal bodyguard of a murdered Hong Kong crime boss—but he also filmed over six weeks of motion capture to create the most authentic and realistic fighting movements imaginable. And with a unique fighting system that mimics Li's flowing, graceful techniques, *Rise to Honor* gives all gamers the chance to proudly proclaim, "I know kung fu!"

JULIA ROBERTS In honor of the upcoming release of *Halo 2*, we dug up this gem of a quote from movie star and all-around hottie Julia Roberts. While being interviewed by MTV, the bubbly bombshell revealed her addiction to bombshells of a different sort when she proclaimed, "I'm addicted to *Halo*! I play it all the time, though I'm not very good."

ROBERTS

RUMBLING OF THE MONTH

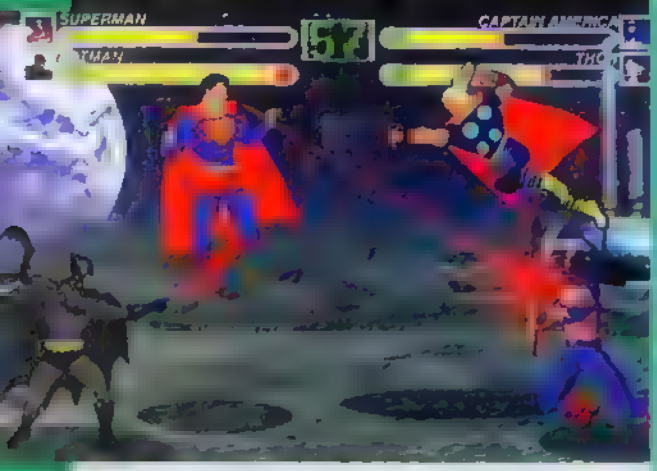
PLAYSTATION PORTABLE!

The PSP has finally been unveiled! Sort of.

Sony recently gave investors a first glimpse at an early concept model for its highly-anticipated portable Playstation unit. The current design blends elements of existing mobile gaming systems like N-Gage with the tried-and-true feel of classic Playstation controls (including the familiar triangle, square, circle and x buttons), but don't count on the final design being exactly like the pictured device.

One thing's for sure: In addition to its impressive gaming capabilities, the PSP will also boast the ability to play movies and digital music. Sony plans to unveil the first real prototypes of the device at E3 2004 in May.

GAMES WE WANNA SEE



JLA/AVENGERS

THE BOOK It took decades to happen, but artist George Perez and writer Kurt Busiek finally brought the two biggest teams in comics together for a four-issue mini-series that consistently topped the charts. Nearly every character that'd ever been associated with either the Justice League or the Avengers showed up with fans cheering on the sidelines as the greatest heroes from each universe went toe-to-toe.

THE GAME This has got to be a fighting game, straight up. We don't need much of a story or fancy scenery. Just give us heroes fighting heroes. A *Street Fighter*-esque game would be perfect, with dozens of characters to choose from on both sides, each with super moves and combos straight from their comic exploits. Now this is a crossover between the two greatest *teams* in all of comicdom, so there'd have to be the option of four-player simultaneous battle. Hell, make it six! There could even be crazy duo combinations that involve two heroes at once. The game would have to feature battlegrounds from all the hot spots of the Marvel and DC Universes like Genosha, the JLA Watchtower, New York City and Apokalips. Since every game these days has to have hidden features and unlockable characters, *JLA/Avengers* would have some awesome ones, including Moon Knight, She-Hulk, Stingray and Quicksilver! You could fight for control of the cosmic artifacts and unlock favorites like Hal Jordan and Wonder Man for even more battlefield chaos!

JUST IMAGINE... This battle is going to be a photo finish. Thor lands a crushing blow to Superman's head with Mjolnir as Iron Man gets caught with his guard down, crushed by Green Lantern's emerald hammer and anvil. Superman's health bar is flashing red as Thor moves in for the kill. Suddenly, GL surrounds the Man of Steel in emerald armor giving him the strength to send Thor packing for Asgaard.

REALITY BYTE Considering it took over 20 years for the comic version of this inter-company crossover to hit stands, don't hold your breath to see it on your video game console. ■ **JESSE M.X. GANGL**

BLOODY GOOD

Crime games load up on bullets, gore

Gone are the days when a pudgy plumber named Mario ruled on the sales charts, only one of dozens of kid-friendly icons that have been recast by a swarm of mature-themed games, with Rockstar's seminal *Grand Theft Auto* franchise being the primary culprit behind the shift of pace.

"The gaming community that was playing *Asteroids* in the 80s has matured, so naturally has their desire for more mature products," explained Chris Archer, Executive Producer of Activision's *True Crime: Streets of L.A.*, an action title about a renegade cop that undeniably spawned after the blockbuster success of *GTA*. Considering *Vice City*, the latest installment of the crime \ franchise, sold over four million copies during its first two months of release on PS2, who wouldn't want a piece of the action? Since its 2002 unveiling, *Vice City* has maintained the number one spot on retail charts and expanded to the Xbox and PC platforms, securing millions more in revenue—the equivalent to a box office champ like *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

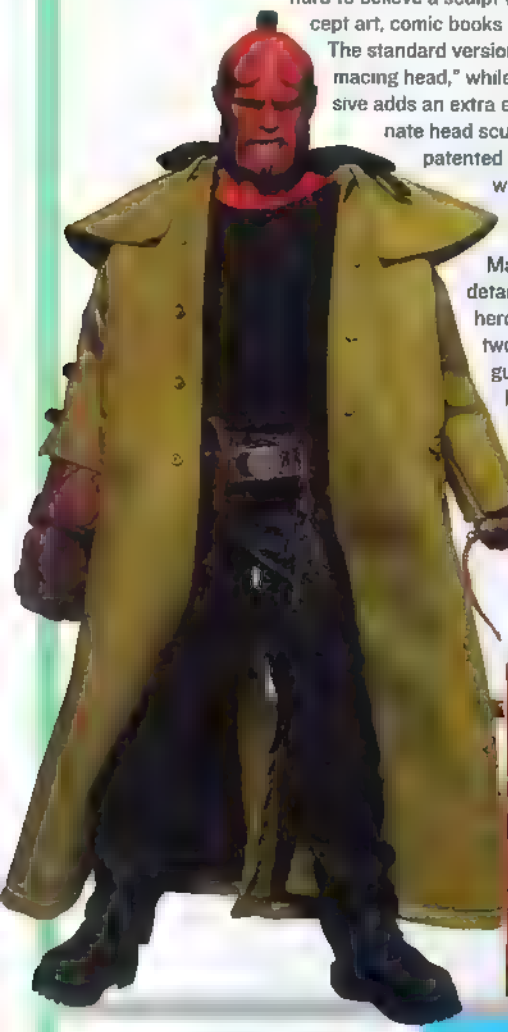
With their unadulterated combat, unlimited ammo and blood-soaked plotlines, games like *Mafia*, *Postal 2*, *Doom III*, *Half-Life 2* and a variety of other titles are also riding on the "over-18" bandwagon, touting mature themes as selling points.

"Although all of us love trends like trucker caps and vintage tees, we also love where games are going," continued Archer. "The *GTA*s and *True Crimes* of the world have created vast, interactive environments for players to have fun in and explore and they clearly want more of it." ■ **JON M. GIBSON**

HELLBOY HITS IT BIG

It hurts to say it, but thanks to Sideshow Collectibles, Hellboy's Ron Pearlman may edge out Bruce Campbell as the coolest square-jawed, B-list, monster movie actor of the day

Here's the proof! Due in April, Sideshow's movie-based 12-inch Hellboy figure is so close to the real deal that it could be Perlman's stunt double. It's hard to believe a sculpt this good was based on concept art, comic books and screen captures alone! The standard version of the figure features a "grimacing head," while a separate Sideshow exclusive adds an extra element of cool with an alternate head sculpt—Hellboy chewing on his patented stogie. Both versions come with "The Good Samaritan" pistol and detailed accessories like a rosary and cross. In May, prepare for equally ultra-detailed 12-inch versions of gilled hero Abe Sapien (also set to have two head sculpts) and Nazi bad-guy Kroenen to round out the line! Own 'em all for around $40 each, and start that mini-B.P.R.D. you've always been dreaming of



SPIDEY'S GONE GREEN

With Marvel Select's newest two-pack, we can't decide which is cooler: a sculpt perfectly capturing the drama of a helpless, unmasked Peter Parker, the above-and-beyond detail of the Green Goblin (with 12 points of pumpkin-tossing articulation), the fact that the whole shebang recreates John Romita's cover to *Amazing Spider-Man* #39 or the Goblin's trendy man-purse, which is years ahead of its time? We're gonna go with the man-purse. Capture it this May for $18.99!

TEEN SCENE SUPREME

DC Direct's Teen Titans Maquettes are available this summer for $89 95 each, featuring Manga-riffic versions of each lad and lass from the hit Cartoon Network series! Robin, Beast Boy, Raven, Starfire and Cyborg are all here in beautiful...umm...Maquette form. Ok, we give up—what's a "Maquette"? Oh, it's a fancy-schmancy way to say "small statue." Damn your French influences on our small statue collecting! It's all we had left!

BUSTED IN A FLASH

If you were DC Direct's new Flash 5-inch mini-bust ($45, June), you'd protect Keystone City with your life, too. Just the *thought* of any harm befalling the city's cash cow—its mass quantities of Keystone Ice and Keystone Light—makes us shudder

DR. ROSS, I PRESUME?

Dynamic Forces' life-size Dr. Doom bust is turning his nose up at the Fantastic Four. Or *perhaps* Doom...smells...cookies?! Should have thought of that before you melted Stretcho's face, pal—you'll go without. The impressive sculpt, based on an Alex Ross sketch, is available this March for a mere $350

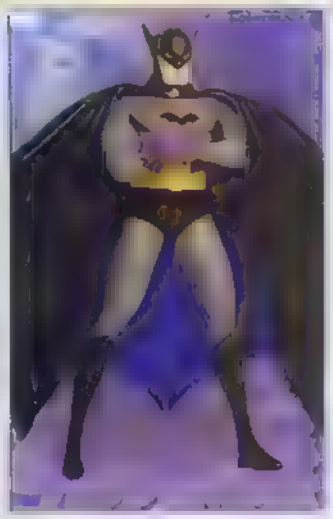
THIS JUST IN!

In addition to producing mini-statues and mini-busts, as reported in *Wizard* #148, Bowen clarified that the sculptor will be producing the same type of products outlined in its original Marvel contract! That means mini-busts, mini-statues and full-size statues! Good news indeed!

FIRST TO WORST

DEBUT FIGURES WE DON'T WANT TO SEE

Nothing says vengeance like a pair of fuscia gloves. At least that's what Bob Kane thought when he unleashed Batman in 1939. This June, DC Direct celebrates these "First Appearances" with a 6-inch action figure line of the same name. The toys feature Bats, Wonder Woman, the Flash and Captain Marvel the way the world first saw them—warts and all. That's pretty cool, but we still hope the following first appearances are never immortalized in plastic.

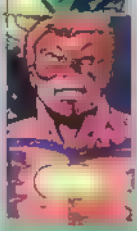


WOLVERINE The weird whiskers on his mask, his tiny little ears...Wolverine looks roughly like a feisty yellow kitten (especially taking on the Hulk) in his first outing. And really, do you want a toy that laps warm milk out of a saucer and rubs against your leg? *Think* before you answer that.

LUKE CAGE No shirt button on earth could contain the original Power Man's manly chest—it demanded to be seen! In toy form, however, that's impossible because "First Appearances" toys are 6-inch, and Cage is strictly a 12-inch toy, baby! Always wondered why that is.

IRON MAN Our moped gets better miles to the gallon than Iron Man's original, clunky suit of "armor." Oh, to one day own a toy with no articulation, a tendency to rust and a bad carburetor! Not to mention that it doesn't have a Hemi.

ROGUE Why not a first appearance Rogue figure, sugah? Her initial puke-green costume (with hood), besides scaring children, served to prevent her from accidentally touching anyone. Thing is, with that skunk-streaked short hair, none of your toys are going near her ass anyway. Oh snap!



GUY GARDNER: WARRIOR Hoo, boy. Guy Gardner as Warrior. We couldn't stomach a toy featuring the debut of his crappity crap war paint "costume" and Lou Ferrigno physique. But, rather than be faced with another "Guy with bowl haircut" toy, we might consider it. We mean, come on. ■ CHRIS WARD

TURNING JAPANESE

American comic creators take on manga adaptations

Ladies and gentlemen, the next big name in the world of manga just might be...Peter David?

In a manner of speaking, yes. The writing machine who once churned out *The Incredible Hulk* for a dozen years has signed on to adapt (along with wife Kathleen) *Negima!*, a new title from Del Rey Manga. And he's far from alone among American comics creators; fans might start noticing more and more familiar names from U.S. titles creeping into the credits of new manga series.

Already on board are Keith Giffen (*Formerly Known as the Justice League*), adapting *Battle Royale* and the upcoming *Battle Vixens* for TOKYOPOP; Sarah Dyer (*Action Girl Comics*), re-penning each volume of *Kodocha*, also for TOKYOPOP; and let's not forget Gerard Jones (*Green Lantern*), who's helmed English versions for Viz (including *Ranma 1/2* and *Inu-Yasha*) for many years.

Dallas Middaugh, Del Rey's director of manga, said he pursued David for *Negima!* specifically for his experience. "*Negima!* is a very funny book," he said. "It's a romantic comedy and at times it's just pure slapstick. And it's very important when you have a [comedy] translation done...that you don't end up translating the humor right out of it. Peter was an excellent choice for that. He's a very funny writer."

For his part, "It seemed like a challenge," said David, himself a fan of such manga series as *Mai, the Psychic Girl* and *Crying Freeman*. "As a writer, I'm always looking for new and different projects to undertake. Plus, you never know where it's going to lead."

Giffen, best known for his runs on *Justice League* and *Legion of Super Heroes*, called his contributions to *Battle Royale* "a labor of love." "I'm a huge fan of the movie," he said. "Unlike a lot of people, I thought it was fall-on-the-floor funny. Nice, sharp, cutting social satire." When he found out the *Battle Royale* manga was coming to America, Giffen got TOKYOPOP on the horn. "I literally called and said, 'I want it, I want it, I want it,'" he laughed.

"My job was to come in and adapt the book so it would appeal to a mainstream American audience—we're talking outside the otaku community here—while maintaining the integrity of the original work," Giffen said. He doubts his name helps *Battle Royale*'s financial bottom line. "[Would] *Chobits* adapted by [Brian Michael] Bendis go through the roof because Bendis is a hot writer doing wonderful work? I really don't think so. I think the audience is [already] there that likes these stories."

INU-YASHA

Battle Royale editor Mark Paniccia, however, thinks Giffen's name value does help boost the book's sales. "I thought this could be a fringe manga in the book market due to its content and figured Keith would help sales in the direct market," Paniccia said. "He's really done a great job with it and it's doing well in both markets, I'm happy to say."

Fans of American and Japanese comics are two separate audiences, David said. "But they could overlap. My assumption is that Del Rey's hoping fans of my work who ordinarily would have passed up *Negima!* will check it out since I'm doing the adaptation."

So, what other stars from the American comics scene could put their stamp on manga releases in the future? "There are some huge mainstream comics writers who have expressed an interest in working with TOKYOPOP, but I won't say anything prematurely," said Rob Tokar, *Battle Vixens* and *Battle Royale* editor. "I will say that Simon Furman (*Transformers, Alpha Flight What If...?*) is doing a great job on *Doll*, a dark series that's coming out in 2004."

If the trend continues to pick up steam, maybe Bendis on *Chobits* isn't so far-fetched after all. ■ **TOM ROOT**

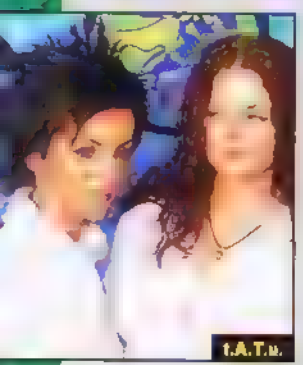
BIG BATTLE Keith Giffen was such a fan of the "Battle Royale" anime he leapt at the chance to translate the manga.

ANIME BUZZBOX

SHARON APPLE A REALITY? UK company Zero G has announced the release of VOCALOID, licensed from Yamaha, which allows users to create synthesized vocal tracks from artificial male and female voice personalities. "LEON" and "LOLA," the male and female vocalist "fonts" were launched in mid-January, while a third, "MIRIAM," will be introduced in early April. The ability to sing any words in English like a professional is eerily similar to the story behind the ultra-hit OAV series and movie, "Macross Plus."

HIKARU UTADA SIGNED Island Records recently announced the acquisition of Japanese pop superstar Hikaru Utada, on their artists' website (www.islandrecords.com/artists.las). Users who click on her name can sign up for a mailing list to receive news about the J-pop singer

CPM MANGA HIT 100 Central Park Media released its 100th graphic novel, *Slayers Super-Explosive Demon Story Book 3: Red Priest*, written by Hajime Kanzaka and drawn by Shoko Yoshinaka, based on character designs by Rui Araizumi. CPM Press' diverse catalog, which includes CPM Manga, CPM Manhwa and CPM Comics, has been both numerous and diverse in styles and titles, and has recently re-sized, re-priced and changed the format of its graphic novels to mirror traditional Japanese formatting.



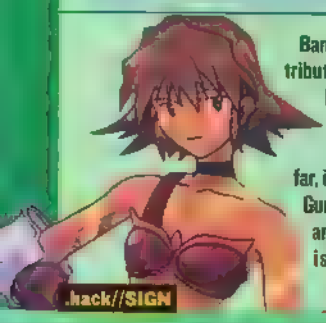
t.A.T.u. YOU Russian pop duo t.A.T.u. will be featured in an anime scheduled to be released in Japan this November. The official website for the anime, "t.A.T.u. Paragate," does not mention the story, but it shows character designs and mentions the staff. Nono Kashima and Susume Kudoh will direct "Paragate," while Shinichiro Watanabe (director of the "Cowboy Bebop" TV series) will direct the opening theme.

TOKYOPOP FOUND IN WAL-MART TOKYOPOP has recently announced that they will be the first manga publisher to sell their titles at Wal-Mart. 100 outlets had market-tested several TOKYOPOP titles throughout the holiday season. Early 2004 will see four other mass-market chains joining in, with Best Buy, Fred Meyer, ShopKo and New England's Stop & Shop marts.

ASIA IN THE USA World Asia Television, which has been heavily touted as the first English-language Asian-themed television network in the United States, will be launching in mid-2004, and while details are scarce as of press time, WA-TV is expected to include anime among its other Asian-related programs.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE MONTH

BANDAI GOES ONLINE



Bandai Japan and Microsoft will begin distributing anime through the Internet using Microsoft's Windows Media technology. South Koreans have already been lucky enough to access five titles thus far, including three Gundam movies, the "Z Gundam" series, "Dirty Pair," ".hack//SIGN" and "Aura Battler Dunbine." The service is expected to be available globally throughout 2004.

ANIME WITH 'SEOUL'

Korean anime reaches America

As if the flood of Japanese animation washing over America wasn't enough, it turns out there's another anime reservoir in Asia that U.S. distributors can tap.

New York-based Anime Crash will introduce English-speaking audiences to a whole roster of Korean animated productions in 2004. The South Korean series "Olympus Guardians," "Track City," "Geisters" and "Ki Fighter" will all see DVD release this year (negotiations to televise the series are ongoing). According to managing director Scott Mauriello, there's plenty more where that came from, and the advantages Korean anime holds over Japan's fare make it an attractive source of future product.

CRASH LANDING "Geisters" will be one of the Korean anime hitting the U.S. in 2004.

"They're eager to get into the American market," Mauriello said, and more accommodating to American companies. Unlike in Japan, the South Korean government actually subsidizes animation in order to encourage its export, he said. That government money gives South Korean animators the freedom to do beautiful work—in fact, Mauriello characterizes some of the Korean movies he's pursuing as "[Hayao] Miyazaki-esque," referring to the Academy Award-winning Japanese anime director.

So what's the difference between Korean and Japanese anime? Visually, none at all, Mauriello said. "You can't tell it's got that anime look we all know." Story-wise, while Japan's frequent anime themes of explosions, radiation and transmutations draw upon the country's World War II devastation, Korean anime also tends to mirror its national history. "It's always a fracture. Two countries or two planets or two places separated, and they're always fighting each other, which is obviously [a parallel to] North and South Korea."

Another feature of Korean anime is that it often parodies its Japanese rivals. Mauriello says Anime Crash's "Ki Fighter" features a "snotball" critter that makes fun of "Pokémon."

Time will tell whether American connoisseurs will embrace Korean anime. But anything that makes fun of "Pokémon" can't be all bad! ■ TR

'TECH' TV

Harmony Gold brings Robotech to DVD

Way back in the 80s, if you weren't break-dancing or playing *Galaga*, chances are, you were watching "Robotech." A science-fiction cartoon assembled from bits and pieces of three separate anime series from Japan, "Robotech" followed a brave squadron of humans who hop aboard a derelict alien spacecraft that lands on Earth. After accidentally warping to the other side of the universe, they struggle to find their way back across the galaxy, fending off an alien race that seeks to reclaim their lost craft. The story captured the imaginations of kids all over the world and can be credited with introducing an entire generation of children to anime. Now, ADV and Harmony Gold are working together to restore the original negatives and bring never-before-seen "Robotech" footage to DVD!

The project, set to be released in 12-episode special edition DVD sets, feature carefully restored video and audio, designed to increase the overall presentation quality while preserving the look and feel of the original broadcast. A full one to two minutes of previously unseen footage are being added to every episode in the series, including cut material deemed too hot for TV!

"We're restoring all of the original material from the that was cut for the initial broadcast," Harmony Gold's Steve Yun said. "'Robotech' fans can rest assured, this is the best possible version of their show."

The release will encompass the entire "Robotech" saga, including the Southern Cross and Mospeada chapters. The first DVD set is due out on Jan. 27 from ADV Films and Harmony Gold ■ **ZAC BERTSCHY**

NEW EDITION In addition to collecting the entire "Robotech" series, Harmony Gold and ADV will include previously unseen material for each episode.

HOTIMPORTS

MANGA

AZUMANGA DAIOH VOL.3 (ADV Films) Senior year has finally come for the girls, and not only are there entrance exams to worry about, but it's their last chance to win the school sports competition, the cultural festival and their school senior trip! $9.99

INITIAL D VOL.10 (TOKYOPOP) The race on Mt. Akagi took its toll on Tak, who now regrets ever racing there, but can he prevent Iggy from making the same mistake? $9.99

FRUITS BASKET VOL.1 (TOKYOPOP) Tohru's had a hard life, living on her own, till the family of the most popular boy in school took her in. But that was before she discovered their secret—when hugged by a member of the opposite sex, they turn into animals from the Chinese zodiac! $9.99

ANIME

SD GUNDAM FORCE VOL. 1 & 2 (Bandai Entertainment) In one of the most hilarious self-parodies ever, the peaceful Neotopia is under attack by the evil Dark Axis, but the rebel brigade Gundam Force, led by the brave Shute, is there to save the day! $19.98 each

KIDDY GRADE VOL. 1 (FUNimation) Special agents Lumiere and Éclair, who wield special powers with finesse and skill, are given the unenviable task of keeping the peace in the galaxy as part of the galaxy-wide organization GOTT. $24.98

LAST EXILE VOL.2 (Geneon Entertainment) Two nations' fates rest in the hands of Claus and Lavie, but even their future is doubtful when they finally experience the effects of the war first-hand Can they survive and ensure the world will go on? $29.98

ANIME 101

KIDDY GRADE

Already a smash hit in Japan, hit science fiction series "Kiddy Grade" reaches the U.S this February from FUNimation and world-famous Studio Gonzo. Highly anticipated by American fans, the story follows the adventures of Lumiere and Éclair, a pair of highly skilled special agents working for the Galactic Organization of Trade and Tariffs (or GOTT). Throughout the 26 episode TV series, Lumiere and Éclair take on all manner of hardened space criminals, delve into clandestine special missions and even unravel a sinister plot within the workings of GOTT itself! Here's a short briefing on what you'll need to know about "Kiddy Grade"! ■ ZB

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INVINCIBLE

Laughs and action dominate, but father knows best as a teen crusader in training learns the superhero family ropes from his old man of steel

WRITER ROBERT KIRKMAN
ARTIST CORY WALKER
PUBLISHER IMAGE

When writer Robert Kirkman co-created *Invincible* with artist Cory Walker, the two set a simple but lofty goal: produce a teen superhero book on par with *Ultimate Spider-Man*

A child of late-'80s, youth-centric superhero comics, Kirkman firmly centered his title around Mark Grayson, the son of his world's most recognizable and powerful superhero, Omni-Man. Discovering he shares the same powers as his father, Mark takes on the role of Invincible, a new superhero But while most teen hero books may focus on the angst, Image's *Invincible* revolves around the fact that the teen protagonist actually *wants* his powers, and strives for his father's approval

"The father-son dynamic came from my desire to do something that I thought was new to comics," says Kirkman "When I was 11, I really related to Robin. So with *Invincible*, I set out to do a fun teen superhero comic in the style of that old *Robin* book I enjoyed so much. Aside from *Ultimate Spider-Man*, there really aren't any good teen comics out there...so I figured there'd be room for a book like *Invincible*."

In fact, the father/son relationship goes so deep that Invincible actually screams out "Dad!" in public when his father gets sucked into another dimension in issue #4, risking both heroes' secret identities. And it's their relationship that's central to the first seven issues—from the world-saving tactics of the two heroes halting an alien invasion to the mundane quality time of seeing them play catch in the clouds, no area of their relationship is out of bounds

But things could come crashing to a halt with the revelation in issue #7 that Omni-Man may have killed the other heroes in the JLA-like Guardians of the Globe!

In other words, *Invincible* makes for one acne-inducing and fast-paced drama akin to shows such as The WB's "One Tree Hill" and Fox's "The O.C.," but with superpowers and a mix of action, humor and teen romance thrown in for good measure

Weaving in subplots of a bomber killing students at Invincible's high school (it turns out to be his physics teacher) to a budding romance between the hero and Atom Eve, a fellow high school student and member of the Teen Team—as well as the girlfriend of Rex Slade, another hero—Kirkman's series is set to launch in a number of new directions in the coming months.

"We'll have issues with a bit more action and then we'll have issues with a bit more humor, but in the end...it all balances out," says Kirkman. "I'm trying to do a lighthearted superhero adventure book, but there's going to be some heavy drama stuff coming. I don't think I'll ever lose sight of the lightheartedness but we're going to be changing and advancing the characters in drastic ways here soon."

In December's issue #7 and January's issue #8, things definitely changed drastically for the title's main characters. The Guardians of the Globe were all murdered by a foe who appears to be Omni-Man, and at the same time, Invincible's love life began heating up as Atom Eve caught her boyfriend cheating on her (with her Teen Team teammate, the multiplying Dupli-Kate) as well as a new hottie at school giving Invincible's alter ego leering glances.

According to Kirkman, the majority of questions fans have about the series will be answered in the four-part "Perfect Strangers" arc beginning in February's issue #9, which also features the second issue by the series' new artist, art newcomer Ryan Ottley.

"There are a ton of things that we'll be touching on in the coming issues, including a bit of romance for Mark," teases Kirkman. "Honestly, I couldn't be more excited about what's coming up in the book. I remember laying out the upcoming events

PUNCH BUGGY Invincible got a lot of detentions for knocking kids through walls whenever a Volkswagen drove by.

FAMILY BUSINESS To ease the tension, Omni-Man took Invinicble flying while discussing the birds and the bees.

in the pitch we first sent Image, and now we're finally getting to that stuff! Readers will be shocked, amazed, and hopefully very entertained by upcoming events."

Comic celebs have already been entertained by *Invincible*—in fact, a number of top creators, including Erik Larsen (*Savage Dragon*) and *100 Bullets* cover artist Dave Johnson, pitched in to pencil issue #7. And *Fantastic Four* penciler Mike Wieringo admits he can't get enough of the new series.

"If you've been looking for that old spark that you used to feel when reading high-flying adventures of your favorite characters—but want something fresh and modern—then you've just got to check out *Invincible*," praises Wieringo. "It's addictive. Take it from me—I'm hooked."

With hip dialogue, huge battle scenes and a riveting father-son relationship, Kirkman says he's going for realism mixed with a good heaping of humor—notably, the absurdity of being part of a superhero family, such as Mark's best friend figuring out his secret identity almost immediately, and changing his costume in the same place other high school seniors use as a make-out hut. But more than that, Kirkman's creating a book that reminds himself and everyone who picks it up of the comics they loved as kids.

"I'm trying to make the most entertaining and compelling superhero action comic in the world," says the writer. "At the end of the day, I just hope to create a title that, at the end of its run, is completely different than it was at the beginning." ■ **MIKE COTTON**

INVINCIBLE 101

With a new book, there's always a lot of backstory to get through before the action can really take off. Here's everything you need to know about the main characters in *Invincible*.

INVINCIBLE (MARK GRAYSON) The son of his world's greatest hero, the teen Invincible recently gained his powers after years of waiting for them to develop. Taking up the mantle of hero while flirting with super-sexy super-chick Atom Eve—and playing upper atmosphere catch with his dad—Invincible's even found time to take down a supervillain or two, including his physics teacher, who was blowing up students after school.

OMNI-MAN (NOLAN GRAYSON) The Superman-like hero came to Earth from a distant planet and quickly became the world's protector. Soon after, Omni-Man, in his secret identity as a writer, married and began a family. A member of The Guardians of the Globe, Omni-Man's a shining example of heroism, but, as fans read in issue #7, someone who appeared to be Omni-Man murdered the entire Guardians team!

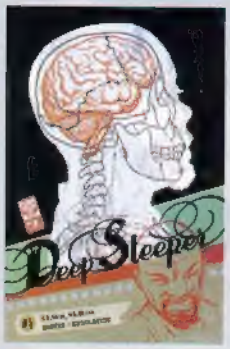
WILLIAM Invincible's best friend, William's often the comic foil. When he sees his best friend in action, William blurts out, "Dude, why didn't you tell me you had superpowers?" And after growing used to his friend's abilities, he convinces Invincible to take him flying, only to have the hero mutter, "This is so gay" as he flies into the sky with William in his arms.

THE MOM Being the wife and mother of superheroes ain't easy, but Mrs. Nolan handles it just fine. When she hears her husband Omni-Man's been sucked into a black hole, the unflappable parent says, "Well, that's more pork chops for us." And when her son announces that he's taking on the family superhero business, her only response is, "That's nice. Can you pass the potatoes?"

ATOM EVE (left) A member of the Teen Team, Atom Eve's been sending Invincible mixed signals since their first encounter in issue #2. While flirting with the hero, she offhandedly mentions that's she's involved with another member of her team, before realizing her boyfriend's cavorting around town with one of her other teammates! After a breakdown, she heads to Invincible's house, where he consoles her only to be interrupted by his mom, who lectures them on teen sex! *That'll* kill a pup tent. ■ **MC**

DEEP SLEEPER

The creators of 'The Coffin' unearth an unnerving new mini-series about nightmares, demon monks and why you might never sleep again



THE DIRT Writer Cole Gibson thought his biggest struggles were with paychecks and family, but when the tales he puts on paper and his horrific nightmares cross over to torment him in the real world, the hardest fight is not losing himself and his loved ones to otherworldly demons.

DOYA LIKE? If you get a thrill from being plugged into head-trips like "The Matrix" that twist reality into a knot, *Deep Sleeper* goes one further and turns it into a hangman's noose that's sure to ensnare surreal horror fans of both H.P. Lovecraft and "The Ring."

DIDJA KNOW? Writing comics won't make you millions of dollars, and for *Deep Sleeper* scribe Phil Hester, being a contestant on the game show "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire" didn't either. "I lost...badly," he laments of his appearance on the show in December 2000. "It was back in the Regis era, so you had to pass the 'fastest fingers' portion to make the hot seat. I was getting shut out left and right until the final question, which I killed on. I sat back and waited for my name to be called, unaware that I had not pressed the 'send' button on my console."

WRITER: PHIL HESTER
ARTIST: MIKE HUDDLESTON
PUBLISHER: ONI PRESS

Some people dream of flying, others dream of finally getting the girl...but Cole Gibson isn't so lucky. The only things flying in his nightmares are the demons finally getting their dark claws around his soul.

Gibson is the hapless subject of writer Phil Hester (*Firebreather*) and *Harley Quinn* artist Mike Huddleston's *Deep Sleeper*, a creepy, introspective journey to the astral plane involving a failing writer and family man who discovers that he has some extraordinary abilities. *Deep Sleeper* follows Hester and Huddleston's previous collaboration, 2001's acclaimed *The Coffin* mini-series (one of *Wizard*'s top 100 trade paperbacks of all time, whose protagonist we named the Best New Character of 2001).

While the first issue of the February-shipping *Deep Sleeper* is not a sequel to *The Coffin*, it was birthed out of a desire to revisit the unique philosophical/sci-fi/horror genre. (Contrary to previous reports, the mini-series has no direct ties to *The Coffin* other than the creative team.)

"*Coffin* fans kept asking for a sequel," explains Hester, who was waiting for a chance to team with Huddleston again. "Mike and I are pretty adamant that *The Coffin* is over—we like happy endings. The only things carrying over from *The Coffin* are Mike, me and the overall flavor of the story." A flavor that, for Cole Gibson, is a harsh one.

Gibson, a hack who struggles with his own realization that he's a hack, has just completed his latest short story—an outlandish tale of a group of monks who, on the surface, display superhuman, "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon"-style abilities, but hide a dark secret underneath. They derive their power by allowing themselves to be possessed by demons, then manipulating their souls to trap the demons and use their power as their own. Gibson quickly finds out that the old saying is true—truth *is* stranger than fiction—when he finds himself drawn to a seminar hosted by a new age guru named Ramman. Ramman—who looks identical to the monk character in Gibson's short story—shows Gibson he has the power to let his soul travel outside of his body.

"Cole has no real control over his power and it makes him a target for some pretty dark and ancient forces," says Hester, who sees Cole's power as more of a curse than a gift. "All manner of wicked beings either want to control him or want him dead."

The beings appear in the form of fellow spirit-world travelers Tulsa and Dar es Salaam, mysterious characters whose motives may or may not be as pure as they seem. (During their first encounter on a city street, Gibson bumps into Dar, only to have Tulsa—who senses in Gibson unseen, unexplored powers—attempt to stab him in the back!) While in a trance at the

STRANGER THAN FICTION Ramman (above) may be a short story character come to life, but that doesn't excuse the unkempt pile of skulls.

AND THE OTHER?
HE KNOWS, PROMISE. THE MASTER HAS PLANTED THE SEED.
SHE SLEEPS TIGHT.
YES.
YOU KNOW IT'S NO GOOD FOR ME.
...UNLESS THEY'RE AWAKE.
WAKE HER, CALDER.

FEEDING FRENZY While all monsters are bad, those that employ bums and dine on the living are particularly unsettling.

seminar, Gibson journeys to the astral plane. He finds the plane stocked with the very horrors that invaded his dreams as he encounters ethereal spirits and a malicious demon named Calder, who patiently waits for the chance to possess Gibson's earthly body, or worse, destroy his family.

"I wanted Cole to grapple with the concepts that really terrify me both as a parent and a human being," reveals Hester. "I'm not scared of slashers or monsters, but I am scared of losing my children in a department store."

Losing his kids in a local Sears would be a walk in the park compared to what Gibson must face, as Hester has prepared a plot twist that's even scarier than anything seen in *The Coffin*. What's the only thing more horrifying than watching your family die? Being there to kill them yourself.

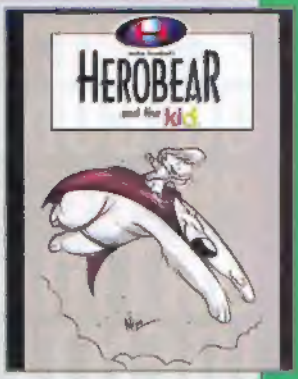
THE LAST WORD A rare example of atmospheric horror, *Deep Sleeper* fashions a tension-filled journey into the mind's darkest catacombs rather than use blood and guts to evoke terror. This book is so chilling, it could speed up the heart rate of a gut-munching zombie! ■ **TODD CASEY**

WANNA PICK UP THIS SERIES?

Call 1 888 COMIC-BOOK to find your nearest comic shop, or visit www.onipress.com to order directly. Do you know about a cool series that deserves the "Secret Stash" treatment? Write to us at "Secret Stash," c/o Wizard Entertainment, 151 Wells Ave., Congers, NY. 10920, or e-mail us at secretstash@wizarduniverse.com.

INDIEBUZZ

HEROBEAR AND THE KID: SAVING TIME Remember when your stuffed toys used to come to life to bail you out of trouble? Well, maybe you don't, but *Herobear* creator Mike Kunkel can still feel the magic! Young Tyler and his super-powered stuffed polar bear are back with a new three-issue mini-series from Astonish Books titled *Herobear and the Kid: Saving Time*. Issue #1 ships in February with covers from Kunkel, Tim Sale (*Hulk: Gray*) and Humberto Ramos (*Spectacular Spider-Man*).



SCARS John Cain was a cop who played by the rules—until writer Warren Ellis got a hold of him. Along with artist-on-the-rise Jacen Burrows, Ellis' six-issue crime grit-fest tells the story of Cain's descent into madness as he hunts a child killer and blurs the line between right and wrong with a smear of crimson. Avatar Press collects the shocking mature readers tale in a deluxe trade paperback this February.

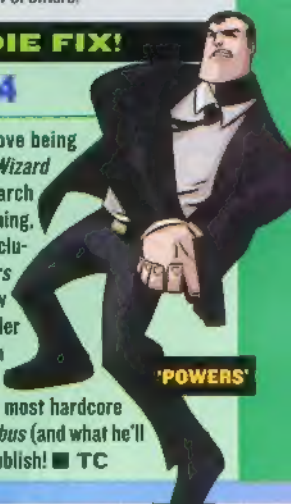
DEAD@17 Check out hot teenage chicks bludgeoning zombies to death when writer/artist Josh Howard's four-issue mini-series from Viper Comics wraps in February. Best friends Nara and Hazy are torn apart by death and brought back together to rip evil a new one in this look at friendship plunked into a fantastical nightmare. It's like "28 Days Later"...without all of the blood vomit.

STREET ANGEL When an evil scientist tries to "re-Pangea-fy" Earth's continents, it's up to a 13-year-old homeless girl named Street Angel to stop them. SLG Publishing describes this March-shipping series as "THE martial arts and skateboarding bonanza of the year! 'The Matrix' crossed with Punky Brewster, Pre-Algebra and your mother!" We're in!

ALTERNATION From 1999's "Draw a Wizard Cover" contest winner Carlos Barberi and writer F.G. Haghenbeck (*Crimson*) comes this Image series about an alternate timeline where every era of Earth's history is combined into a single chaotic reality populated by samurai, cowboys, Mark Twain, dinosaurs, Jack the Ripper and a slew of others!

YOUR DELUXE INDIE FIX!

WIZARD EDGE 2004



If you dig "Secret Stash," then you'll love being buried in the indie extravaganza that is *Wizard Edge*, taking the stands by storm on March 17th! Brian Michael Bendis and Mike Oeming, co-creators of *Powers*, whipped up an exclusive eight-page prelude to their *Powers* relaunch in March, debuting a brand new character and kicking off a thrilling murder mystery. Plus, if you think you know Kevin Smith, we'll put you to the test with an insane trivia challenge that'll stump his most hardcore fans. Also, Dave Sim talks the end of *Cerebus* (and what he'll do next) and we teach you how to self-publish! ■ TC

14 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT BRIAN BENDIS

1. INSPIRATION HIT Bendis at a local coffee shop. Bendis was mulling over ideas for the lead character in his *Jinx* series. He knew that he wanted a female character, but wasn't sure what she should do. Spotting a tough chick with a gun, he asked her what she did. She said, "I'm a bounty hunter."

2. KEEPING BUSY is something the scribe learned to do early on. Bendis attended a private Hebrew school, which he credits with giving him his work ethic. He would start at 6:30 in the morning and not leave until 7:30 at night (spending half the day studying Hebrew material, and the other half studying secular material).

3. NIGHT OWL. A typical day for the *Ultimate Spider-Man* writer starts around 1 p.m. and ends at 7 a.m. During these hours he can work on any of the many books he's writing, including *Daredevil*, *Ultimate X-Men*, *The Pulse* and *Ultimate Spider-Man*, because he's roughly six months ahead on all of them.

4. A QUICK TURNAROUND set the foundation for *Ultimate Spider-Man*. After getting the plum assignment, Bendis wrote the title's first two issues over a weekend.

5. IT'S THE THOUGHT THAT COUNTS. Bendis hates thought balloons that recap previous events in comics. The *Daredevil* scribe loathes the writing device so much, he refuses to ever use it.

6. FALSE ADVERTISING. Bendis left Todd McFarlane Productions after *Hellspawn* #6 was rewritten without his knowledge. His qualm was not with the rewrite, but with his name being attached to something he had not written.

7. PLUGGING AWAY. Between the ages of 20-25, Bendis sent out roughly 4,000 submissions.

8. LIGHT MOVES. The documentary "Visions of Light" changed Bendis' life. According to the writer, watching the documentary about cinematography was a "religious experience," and he recommends that everyone working on comics should see and study the film.

9. ARTISTIC ALIAS. Bendis did all the art layouts for Marvel/MAX's *Alias*.

10. BATMAN DOESN'T INTEREST HIM. Bendis says he will probably never do a Batman story. "People think they want to read my Batman stories more than they really want to read them. I just don't feel it for Batman the way I do for other characters."

11. DREW CALLING. Bendis originally envisioned Jessica Drew, the original Spider-Woman, as the main character for *Alias*. He fell in love with the character after reading *Avengers Annual* #10 in 1981, but Marvel had plans for her and he was forced to create Jessica Jones.

12. JAIL TIME was a possibility for Bendis, who was almost arrested once while he and a friend were shooting a photo reference for *Jinx* on a Cleveland bridge. People called the police complaining of a man with a gun on the bridge during rush hour.

13. BENDIS LOVES GOOD DIALOGUE. And when it comes to writers, Bendis makes no bones about his love for the work of writer/artist Howard Chaykin on *American Flagg!*.

14. READ OR DIE. His favorite book of all-time is Richard Price's *Clockers*. He's also a fan of *High Fidelity* author Nick Hornby. ■ HEIDI WARD

PARTY ANIMAL To pay the bills, Bendis worked parties doing caricatures before hitting it big with *Ultimate Spider-Man*.